

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS  
AS TO  
CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE

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REV. FRANK T. LEE

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# POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS

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## CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE

BY

REV. FRANK T. LEE

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TO  
OBERLIN COLLEGE,  
MY ALMA MATER,

with ever increasing gratitude for its distinctively  
Christian spirit and its profound influence on the life and  
character of the thousands who have studied within its  
walls.

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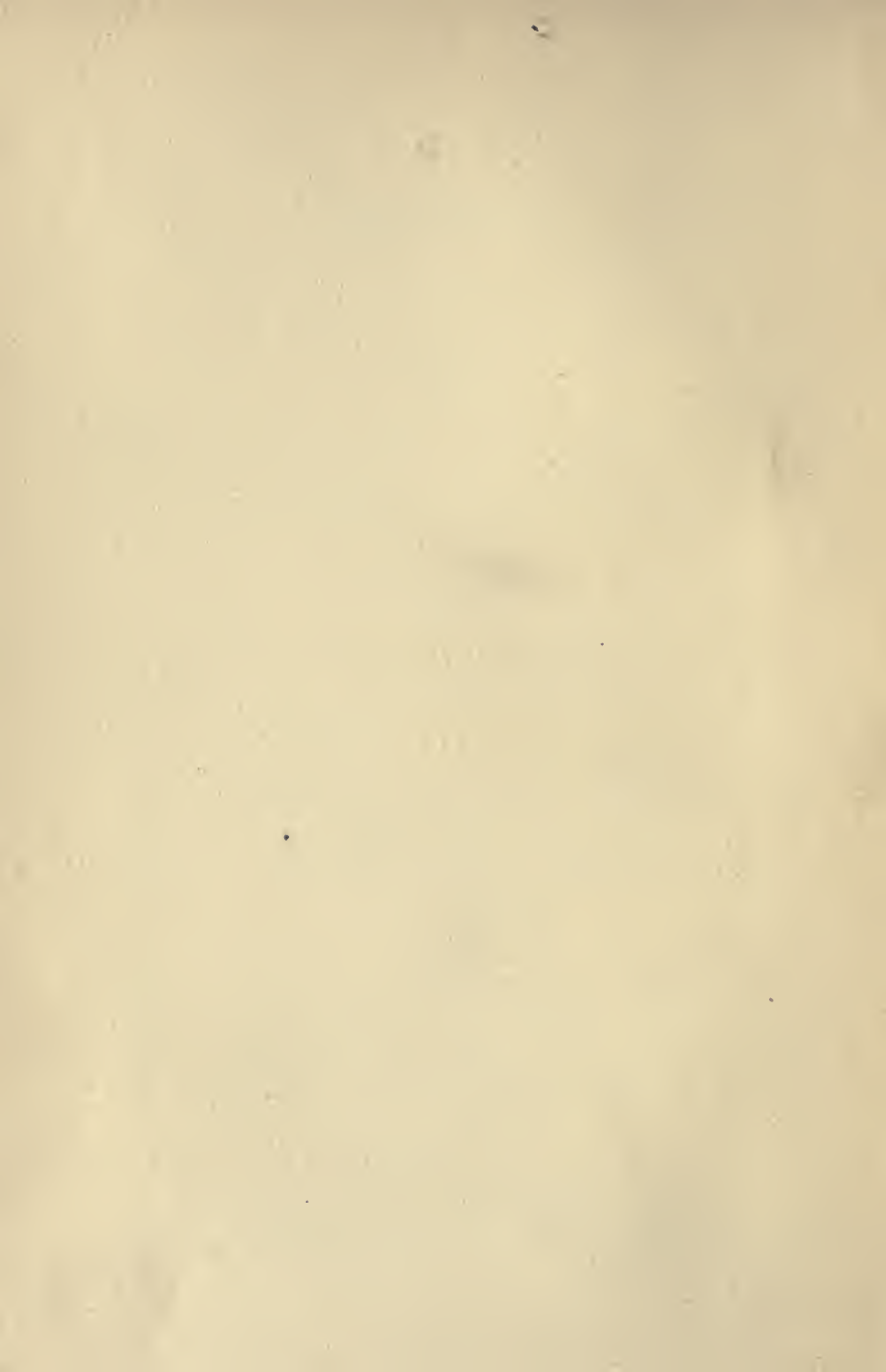
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BOOK I

FAITH





I

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE BASIS OF  
CHRISTIAN FAITH

The central object of Christian faith is Jesus Christ. He is the corner-stone of the Christian system. But what is the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ? What is the ultimate basis upon which the superstructure of the Christian system rests—the bed-rock of our conviction of its reality, of its truth, and of our confidence in it? The misconceptions which prevail upon this point, not alone among skeptics and cavilers, but among Christian people as well, are numerous and radical. This fact leads to a confusion and an embarrassment of mind on the part of the latter, of which the opponents of Christianity, ever on the alert, are not slow to take advantage.

There are those who entertain the idea that the basis of the Christian system is a creed. This, to their minds, is the final authority by which men must stand or fall in matters of religious belief. If this gives way, or if any article of it fails, the whole superstructure must fall. Than this there could hardly be a graver misconception. A creed is merely a summary of what some person, or a number of persons, conceive to be the fundamental truths of the Christian religion. This summary is not inspired, nor is it necessarily free from error. It is a human production, an attempt to set forth in an orderly way the great truths of the Christian system, which are contained in the Scriptures, but which are nowhere formulated in them.

But as men agree in accepting the Bible as a whole who yet differ in their judgments as to the interpretation of some parts of it, or as to what constitute its

fundamental and essential teachings, or as to their relative importance, there is naturally more or less difference in their statements or creeds. Before they can affiliate closely, or engage together effectively in Christian service, it is of vital consequence that they be substantially agreed as to the foundations upon which they stand. Otherwise, occasions of discord are likely to arise. It is but natural, therefore, that persons of similar opinions go apart and draw up statements embodying their views. What they thus formulate constitutes their platform or creed. In this way most of the historic creeds have had their origin.

So long as a creed serves as a basis of union in matters of religious belief, or as a rallying-point for aggressive Christian effort, it is of real convenience and practical value. But when its importance is unduly magnified, and it is reckoned as of equal or even greater authority than the Word of God, from which it was derived, and is regarded with corresponding reverence, it becomes an occasion of endless confusion and untold mischief.

From the nature of the case, therefore, a creed cannot properly be regarded as the ultimate foundation of the Christian faith.

But may not the foundation which we are seeking, the final authority in things religious, be found in the Christian Church? Was it not intended that the Church should be a depository of the oracles of God, and the authorized interpreter of these oracles to men? Was it not declared that the gates of hell should not prevail against it? Are we not, for these reasons, justified in locating here the ultimate basis of the Christian faith?

So some appear to think. The Church is regarded by them as virtually, if not actually, infallible—the court of last resort, to which final appeal must be made. Thus salvation hinges upon acceptance of its authorized teachings and upon membership in it. There are serious difficulties in maintaining such a position as this. While

the Church is a divine institution, it is a human institution as well, and is composed of very imperfect, fallible people. The Church is divine in its origin, in its ideal, in its Head, but, as it exists on the earth, it has often shown itself to be decidedly human.

Furthermore, there are numerous divisions or sections of the Church universal. Each of these, with more or less urgency, claims to be the one true Church. Which of these divisions is to be recognized as the court of appeal? We naturally have our church preferences, but others, no less sincere, and whose judgment may be equally sound, prefer other branches or denominations than those we favor. Who shall decide between us? Further, no section of the Church has always been so consistent in its actions, or so free from error or bias in its deliverances, as to warrant a claim of infallibility, or as possessing final authority in matters of faith. Nor is there anything in Scripture to sustain the claim that the mere intellectual acceptance of the tenets of the visible Church, or any portion of it, or of membership in it, ensures salvation. The vital thing is personal union with Jesus Christ. The Savior makes this the one and only condition of salvation.

The Church, as instituted by Christ, was designed to be the main agency for promoting his cause and kingdom in the world. In spite of imperfections, it has been of immense service to mankind, and was never more efficient in its ministrations than it is to-day. The value of its testimony to the reality, power and divine origin of Christianity cannot be estimated too highly. But this is far from making it the foundation of the Christian faith.

It is often asserted that the Bible, the inspired Word of God, is the foundation of our faith; that this is the bed-rock upon which we are to stand; that if this give way, if the discoveries or the investigations of science in any respect weaken or undermine any of its declara-

tions, or if any error, however slight, be found in it, or if some book included in the Scripture canon be proved not properly to belong to it, or not to have been written by the man whose name it bears; that this would destroy the foundation of the Christian system, and compel us to surrender the hopes as to the future life which we have so long and so fondly cherished.

This many have feared. Conceding that some or all of the suggestions above made should become true, what reasons would we then have for the direful apprehensions suggested? In what way would the essential teachings of the Bible be thereby impaired? How would its authority in moral and spiritual things, which are the only vital things, be in the least disturbed? Some theories of inspiration might require revision in order to correspond with the facts, but the Bible itself would still remain our authority in spiritual things, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

Although the questions suggested are not at all disturbing to one who has given the subject careful study, and is able to take comprehensive views of the scope and ruling purpose of Scripture, they are nevertheless a stumbling-block to many professing Christians and to many honest inquirers. Hence there are difficulties in making the Bible, even as an inspired volume, the only foundation of Christianity. This is to impose unnecessary burdens upon the defenders of the faith; to raise questions which may not be easily answered. Not that it is impossible to answer them, but that many Christians are unable to do so.

In such circumstances it is important to inquire if there is not some other and better way of presenting the matter; if some position may not be taken which is less exposed to assault, or from which attacks may be warded off with less difficulty. Is there not some Gibraltar fortress of defence wherein one may be absolutely secure?

Fortunately there is such a position, whose importance

and strength have been recognized and appreciated in growing degree by Christian scholars in recent years. Some, indeed, regard this position as furnishing the only true foundation, solid and immovable, for Christian faith. This position is not found in the acceptance of any creed, although the value of creeds is not to be disparaged. Nor is it to be found in the Church or in any portion of the same. Nor is it in any dogma or definition of inspiration, although the fact and principle of inspiration are not to be set aside. Nor is it even in the Bible itself as a sacred book, firmly as it has stood through ages of fierce assault. The ultimate foundation of Christianity, as many competent judges declare, is a dual one, historic and experimental. The superstructure of the Christian faith rests, first of all, upon the solid and enduring rock of historic evidence; secondly, upon the confirmation of the same in the experience of men of every age, race and clime.

Notice, first, the historical basis of Christianity. Certain incontrovertible historic facts, which have never been set aside or seriously disturbed by all the mighty assaults of ancient or modern criticism, constitute this basis. They relate primarily to the person of Jesus Christ, the Christ of history, the Word made flesh. To present this argument in compact yet comprehensive form, we may quote from Dr. George P. Fisher, of New Haven, one of the clearest and ablest writers of the times upon this subject :—

The Christian religion is made up of, or springs out of events which form a part of the history of mankind. They occurred at a definite epoch, and in a particular province of the Roman Empire. Some of the historians of these events, indeed, whose veracity has never been successfully impeached,—although no age has been free from attempts to do so,—set their narratives in connection with universal history, by their incidental references to recognized historical characters, nations and political events. Thus Christianity is fundamentally and preeminently an historical religion. The central figure and fact of this set of historical facts is Jesus Christ, the superiority of whose character over any character known to history, or ever conceived in human thought, and whose uplifting, ennobling influence upon the world's life no one can deny. The facts pertaining to him and his life, his mighty deeds, remarkable as they

are, his resurrection from the dead, are all established, as they must be, if at all, in precisely the same way as facts in regard to any other historical character; as, Julius Cæsar, Alexander, Socrates, Plato, Cromwell, and others, only with far greater certainty. The records of his life, written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and to some extent by Paul, regarded simply as any other historical documents, and entirely apart from any thought of their relation to the Bible, as they must be in matters so momentous,—considered simply as secular or profane history, on the same footing with it,—these records have been subjected to the severest imaginable tests, and to the fires of a remorseless criticism, as no other records ever were, and this for ages; and yet, so strong have they proved themselves to be, that some of the most able and determined opponents of the inspiration of the Scriptures and of the supernatural have been constrained to acknowledge them as truly historical and entitled to credit on grounds entirely apart from any theory of inspiration.

This would seem to be conclusive in regard to the historical basis of the Christian faith. It is faith in a great history. It is a religion which rests upon historic facts. Nor is it limited to those facts which are set forth in the few conceded historic books of the New Testament, although these are adequate to establish the historic character of Christianity. Properly regarded, this history reaches back through prophets, sages, kings and patriarchs, to the time of the earliest annals extant, and includes whatsoever in the Old Testament relates to the Christ of history by way of anticipation, or whatever, outside of the conceded historic books in the New Testament, in any way refers to the fulfilment of those predictions. What is more, the Christian faith alone, of all the religions of the world, is primarily a religion of historic facts, and it alone can successfully challenge the most searching investigation.

We see, therefore, how comprehensive, how strong and unassailable this historical argument or foundation is, and how by accepting it, without in any way disparaging the sacred volume, or the fact of inspiration, we are relieved of many painful and constantly recurring embarrassments.

The validity and importance of the experimental proof, or confirmation, have been recognized and appreciated in

a growing degree especially since it was set forth and emphasized at the beginning of the century by Schleiermacher of Berlin. His argument is really the argument of the early New England fathers. It is based upon the warranted assumption that the experiences of the individual soul are as valid evidence in the sphere of religion as are material facts in the realm of nature. If a man is conscious of a new power or force imparted to him through prayer to Christ and faith in him, by virtue of which he is enabled to live righteously, soberly, godly, as he could not otherwise do, that is a fact of experience, and it is to be reckoned as such. If the same experience comes to another person, the reality of the experience of the first is thereby confirmed. If now this experience is testified to by others, by all, indeed, who have fulfilled the conditions upon which this spiritual power is promised, and this not in one age simply or by one class or race of people, but by all classes and in all ages, the testimony as to the reality of the experience and of the spiritual force accompanying it would seem to be undeniable.

As a matter of fact, whenever one does receive the gospel of Jesus Christ in good faith, and allows it freely to operate within him—i. e., whenever one does as the New Testament tells him to do, turns from sin and enters upon a life of obedience to Christ—he at once experiences a sense of God's forgiving love; there is no longer any condemnation; the grace of God is imparted to him, just as the New Testament declares. By means of this grace, he is able to gain victories over self and evil habit; his life is gradually transformed morally; he becomes superior to trial, is buoyed up in sorrow, is girded for the endurance of all manner of hardships; he is inspired for service, his deeper cravings are satisfied, his soul's aspirations are met; the graces of the Spirit are developed in him; old things pass away, all things become new. These are some of the fruits or practical results of the grace

of God when it is received into one's heart and life through faith in Jesus Christ.

The same or similar results are experienced by others who follow the same directions or fulfil the same conditions. It is so to-day, it has been so ever since the glad tidings were first announced, and it has been so among all classes and conditions of men in all parts of the earth. This gospel is distinctly traceable to the time of Christ, to Christ himself as its author, who first announced it to men. Thus the reality of the grace of God, the truth of the religion and teachings of Christ, the uniform character of the results produced in those who receive the gospel, are confirmed by experience, and the deeper and more thorough this experience is, the more clearly are the truths of the New Testament teachings and the reality of the Christian religion demonstrated.

This proof, like that from history, is more comprehensive than might at first appear. It includes everything which relates to men's experience of Christ simply as a teacher, which is all that some admit him to be, as well as that which relates to men's experience when they receive him as their only Saviour from sin. Experience also proves the perfect adaptedness of the Christian religion to all the profounder needs of human nature, and thus meets the most exacting demands of man's nature as a rational being.

Does all this signify nothing? Must all this go for naught? Rather does it not signify everything? Accepting the reality and the validity of this internal evidence, and its correspondence with and confirmation of the external or historical proofs of Christianity, how can we longer doubt the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or that in it we have the one and only heaven-designed provision for the profounder needs of man, or of his spiritual nature? In short, what no other religion has ever been able to do for man, what no philosophy has ever

accomplished, the religion of Christ is doing, and has been doing, since the time when it was first introduced into the world. Thus it is shown to be the only effective remedy or antidote for sin which has ever been made known, even the power of God unto salvation; to be perfectly adapted to the needs of universal human nature. Thus is it manifestly the one religion which is destined ultimately to prevail over all the earth. Occasional testimony here and there to the effect that all this has been tried without such results, is to be taken, if at all, as exceptional, with the moral certainty that some essential condition has been lacking.

Thus we have the two-fold, complementary, unassailable proof, the outer and the inner, the historical and the experimental, of the reality, the effectiveness, the divine origin, of the religion of Jesus Christ. Here we have the solid foundation, the broad, all-inclusive, ultimate basis upon which the Christian faith and the Christian system rest. Thus we see that although the position which men formerly took, with the inspired Bible for a basis, was so strong as to resist all efforts to overthrow it for more than seventeen centuries, the position which we have taken, on the basis of history and experience, the Jesus of history being the chief corner-stone, is so strong that it stands secure, its enemies even being judges. In the light of all this, it is not strange perhaps that modern infidel writers and platform lecturers and hostile critics on the streets evade, or take care not to recognize, even if they understand, the vital point at issue.

With these questions as to the foundation of Christianity settled, and other cumulative proofs ranging themselves about them, or upon them, let any one in sincerity and in truth but fasten his gaze upon the person of Christ thus historically revealed, whose religion is experimentally confirmed,—upon his sinless character, his marvelous power, his mighty works, his self-sacrificing

love, his resurrection, and his ascension to heaven, it will be strange, indeed, if one is not, like multitudes before him, overwhelmed with conviction, and constrained, as was the doubting disciple of old, to cry out, "My Lord and my God."

We are now prepared to notice some of the practical advantages growing out of a recognition of these facts, and of the transference of the main defence of Christianity to the citadel of history and experience:—

1. The first advantage is, that even if some of the theories of inspiration which have prevailed, especially the verbal theory, viz., that every word and letter and dot of the text of Scripture was dictated by the Holy Spirit in such a way that the writer himself was little else than a machine, a typewriter, a stenographer, making use of no powers or faculties of his own, simply transcribing or copying what was given him, the human element being thus practically left out of the account—even if this view could not be sustained (few now assert it), we should still be secure; there would be no occasion for disturbance. Our faith rests upon something more firm and unchanging than any single dogma or theory.

2. Again, even if it should be proven that the authenticity of some clause, or verse, or passage, or chapter, or even book of the present Scripture collection cannot be maintained; or if errors or discrepancies or wrong numbers or dates should be pointed out; or if the historicity of certain Old Testament narratives should no longer be upheld, even then no one would have occasion for anxiety. Our faith does not rest upon the verbal accuracy of every word or passage of Scripture. It rests, rather, upon the solid rock of historic fact and experimental confirmation of that fact. So long as this two-fold proof cannot be set aside, we need not let go our confidence in Christ, or surrender any of the hopes which his words of promise have awakened. It is well to guard ourselves against

allowing these merely minor and secondary questions, which have little or nothing to do with the real essence of Scripture, so to fill our thought as to prevent a proper appreciation of that which is vital.

3. This position gives us every advantage in meeting the opponents of Christianity or of the Scriptures. The majority of the objections they urge are simply such as have been urged time and again in the ages past, and as often refuted. It is rare that any really new objection is raised. But not every Christian may have answers ready when the difficulties are presented. Nor is it necessary that he should. It by no means follows that these difficulties cannot be met, because a particular Christian may not be able to meet them. Only a Biblical scholar, with the most complete equipment, is able to cover the whole ground in his thought. Suppose, for instance, one were to be pressed with difficulties about the exterminating wars of the Jews, or the deluge, or the imprecatory psalms, or about David's morality or lack of it, or about slavery and polygamy in Old Testament times, or about the sun's standing still, or about the book of Jonah, he can simply say that these questions have nothing to do, necessarily, with the real foundation of his faith. These objections, important as it may be to answer them, do not, after all, touch the main question. They are merely side issues. One may tell his opponents to criticize the character of Jesus Christ, if they feel competent to do so; or the historic records concerning him; or to invalidate the argument from Christian experience. So long as the Christ of history remains, and his religion continues to produce the same results in human experience as in the past, the arguments and objections of unbelievers are of little consequence.

4. There is encouragement here for such as desire to be numbered among the followers of Christ, but who are honestly perplexed over many things pertaining to the Scriptures. For the terms of salvation agree perfectly

with what has been said. It is nowhere stated that one must believe the Bible, or everything in the Bible, in order to be saved. There are good and sufficient reasons for accepting the Scriptures, as we have them, but this is not the condition of salvation. It is over and over again declared, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." It is important to get Christ disentangled, so to speak, in our thought, from all creeds, even from the Bible itself, so that he stand out distinctly and apart from everything else before the mind. When one succeeds in doing this, the whole matter of the gospel and of personal religion is greatly simplified. Sometimes, indeed, the experience comes to the soul with the force of a fresh revelation from heaven. The essential thing, first of all, is to believe on and to obey the personal Jesus Christ.

To say this is not to disparage the Word of God, or anything contained in it. In more highly exalting Christ, who is the central figure of the Bible, the central character of history, and the moral luminary of the world, we none the less appreciate the Scriptures, which give us the historical account of him, furnishing us with the settings of the picture, constantly pointing to him, and presenting to us his teachings. We are simply calling attention to the facts in the case. The effort is to relieve the minds of any who find a stumbling-block at the very threshold of the Christian life in the fancy that it is required of them, as perhaps the essential and vital thing, to believe a long line of particulars, extending from the first man to the consummation of all things. This is a serious misapprehension of the real truth of the matter. No one need trouble himself, at the outset, with any of these perplexing questions, or about the immoralities which prevailed in the twilight of the race. All these questions may be dismissed from the thought. The true starting-point of investigation is to satisfy oneself as to the historical reliability of the record, and the experimental reality of the Christian faith. The vital thing for salvation, first

of all, is personal union with, and loyalty to, the personal Christ. All through the New Testament the personal Christ is held up as the object of faith and obedience. Let one but yield himself in loving, trusting self-surrender to him, to the Christ of the Gospels and of history, and all the rest which is really important will in due time be made plain. "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching." And even if one's difficulties are never all solved, even though interrogation-points continue to be scattered all over the Bible field, nevertheless he will be sure of his foundation, for his feet will be planted on the Rock of Ages.

5. A final advantage to be noted is this, that a general recognition of this historic and experimental basis as the ultimate foundation of Christian faith, with the Christ of history as its central figure, would do much to remove long-standing obstacles to Christian union and help greatly to promote it.

As compared with this all-important question, such questions, for instance, as those relating to church polity, which has been a leading factor in keeping Christendom divided; or to the sacraments and mode of observing them, which ought long ago to have been relegated to the realm of individual liberty; or to theological distinctions, whose importance has been greatly exaggerated;—the relative minor consequence of such questions as these, important as they may be in their place, would more and more clearly appear. A large liberty of opinion might be safely permissible in regard to other things, if men were thoroughly agreed in regard to their relation to the personal Christ. Other questions have their place and their importance; this has a central place, and is all-important. With the truth recognized that Jesus Christ, the central fact of human history, is the divine Son of God, the moral and spiritual luminary of the world, the final authority in things spiritual, the only hope for all mankind, apart from whom none can be saved, all the

great doctrines of the Christian system would assume their relative positions, while upon this broad basis Christian people everywhere, of whatever name, might, if they would, stand together, presenting an unbroken front to the world; might cooperate together in aggressive service, going forward in battle array, with mighty, ever-increasing moral and spiritual momentum, to destroy the works of the devil and to build up the kingdom of God; a power which nothing could withstand, and the time would not be remote when He, whose right it is, would everywhere be recognized and reign supreme as King of kings, and Lord of lords.

## II

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE BIBLE

Conspicuous among the large historical paintings which adorn the Parliament building at London, is one representing the departure of the Pilgrims on their voyage across the Atlantic, to seek a home and religious liberty in a new and untried land. Very noticeable in the forefront and center of the picture is an open volume. That volume is the Bible, devotion to whose principles prompted the hazardous journey of those early fathers, and nerved them to heroic endurance of its hardships and trials. In the Capitol at Washington is another painting which represents the landing of the Pilgrims on these inhospitable shores. The same book—significant and prophetic fact!—is still in the forefront; a book whose principles lie at the foundation, as they also constitute the framework, of the Christian civilization which these Pilgrims were instrumental in establishing in this country.

Wonderful as this book is, and marvelous as has been its history; a book which seeks and promotes the highest welfare of men, so easy of comprehension that he who runs may read; a book which is more loved and revered than any other, and for which multitudes would go to the stake: it is nevertheless true that no book is more misunderstood than the Bible, none is the object of more unthinking prejudice, none is more bitterly hated. Why is this?

First of all is a lack of acquaintance with the contents of the Bible, and a consequent lack of appreciation of its spirit and aim. The knowledge of many persons respecting the sacred Word is gathered from flippant, indiscriminating and hostile talk about it on the streets;

from misrepresentations and caricatures on the platform and in the press, made by those who are never weary of holding up crude and obsolete beliefs to ridicule; from the extreme views of narrow-minded though well disposed believers, who are far from representing the consensus of opinion of the great body of intelligent Christian people, or the latest results of the ripest Christian scholarship. It is from such sources as these that many of these critics of the Bible obtain their stock in trade; upon them many of the prevailing misconceptions respecting the sacred Word are based. They spring not from a personal knowledge of its contents, but rather, if one may so say, from personal ignorance of them.

Another source of misconception and of unbelief as related to the Bible is to be found in a not unnatural rebound of the mind, when it begins to think for itself, from the traditional beliefs, bordering upon superstition, if not actually superstitious, which one has been taught to cherish, to the opposite and equally unreasonable extreme of believing little or nothing at all. Instead of seeking a golden mean of truth, one determines to part company with all religious belief, although this last position is as irrational as the first. Illustrations of this experience appear among those reared in the Mormon faith, with its spurious "revelations" to one Joseph Smith. Among those trained in other faiths in which there is more or less of a superstitious element, or in homes or surroundings where unreasonably rigid and severe religious views have prevailed, many pass through a similar experience.

The hostility of another class is to be traced directly to a wicked heart. The Bible everywhere insists upon purity of character and righteousness of life; is in deadly opposition to sin of every kind; points out the danger and the penalty of violating God's law. Chafing under restraint, loving darkness rather than light, men often blind their eyes to the teachings of the Bible and set themselves violently against them.

Ignorance of what the Bible contains, mental rebound from early servitude to beliefs which are unwarranted to an equally unreasonable opposite extreme, and a downright wickedness of heart which chafes under restraint, these are the causes of much of the misconception, prejudice and hostility against the Word of God.

These misconceptions are of every variety and are well-nigh numberless. Thus it is said that the Bible stands in the way of human progress, civilization, intellectual culture; that it supports and encourages slavery, polygamy and kindred evils; in general has an immoral tendency; that there is claimed for it an infallibility which extends to every particle, and an inspiration which reaches to every dot and every letter and every word, embracing also the division into chapter and verse, and even the headings of the chapter; that it abounds in discrepancies and contradictions; that it claims that in the completeness in which it was given to men there is no place for a human element in its composition; that it is therefore an unreal book, having little relation to practical life; that its prophecies set forth the entire future of the world's history, down to its minutest details; that all parts of the Bible are equally inspired, equally important, and that salvation hinges upon an unhesitating acceptance of everything which it contains.

By setting forth a few facts concerning the origin and composition of the Bible, its alleged mysteries and moral difficulties, and by pointing out the true criterion by which to judge of its practical value, many of the widely spread misconceptions in reference to its nature may be corrected.

1. First of all, it is important clearly to understand just why God reveals himself to men; what the authentic record of this revelation is; what are its real object and aim. If one enters St. Peter's at Rome, supposing it to be a dwelling-house, an arsenal, or a workshop, one can neither interpret its arrangement nor properly judge of its fitness to the end designed. One does not know

what that end is. Starting with the wrong idea, one's conceptions are of course erroneous. Only as one regards the structure, with its altars and chapels and various appointments, in the light of the fact that it is a cathedral, and that it is intended for certain religious ends, can one appreciate it, or form any proper judgment respecting it. So no one can interpret the Bible aright, save as one comes to it with some adequate conception of its purpose. Otherwise, one has no business to attempt to interpret it, least of all to palm off one's own conclusions as authoritative for the misleading of others.

What, then, is the design of revelation, or of the Bible, which is the record of that revelation? The Bible nowhere claims to be a scientific text-book or treatise, a manual or authority upon philosophy, poetry, literature, or astronomy, although it makes frequent references to them all. Its purpose is moral and spiritual. It was designed to reveal God and his will to men. It was given to teach men how to lead spiritual lives, to present the motives for leading them, and for abandoning every form of wrong-doing and unholy thinking; for being obedient to God, righteous and kind in all human relations. The Bible was given to promote the highest welfare of men in this life, by showing them how to avoid its perils and its disasters, and how to secure for themselves an abundant entrance into the more glorious life to come. This is what the Bible is for, primarily. To this end it was given, for this purpose it was inspired, and in this respect we believe it to be infallible. Anything aside from this main purpose is incidental and secondary. The poetry and philosophy, the geology and astronomy of the Bible, are of minor importance. Were errors in some of these departments to be proven, this would in no degree invalidate the authority of the Bible in moral and spiritual things. Whether there are or are not errors or discrepancies in the Scriptures is an open question.

As a matter of fact, however, many of these so-called

errors are not difficult of explanation. Some of them may be attributed to faulty translations. Others arise from mistakes in transcription by hand, which was the only method of multiplying copies of the Bible prior to the invention of printing. In other cases still, a more complete acquaintance with all the circumstances would establish the essential accuracy of the Scripture statement. For example, it is reported in one of the four Gospels, that Christ ascended from Olivet; in another, that it was from Bethany. But Bethany was a village on the eastern slope of Mount Olivet. Thus it was from Olivet in either case that the ascension took place. This is but one of numerous instances in which a larger knowledge of the facts would effectually dispose of charges of discrepancy and contradiction in Biblical statements.

If, from the sum total of these supposed errors which are charged up against the Scriptures, we deduct all which may be easily explained, the number remaining will be exceedingly small. More than this, the supposed errors themselves will appear to be exceedingly trivial. Nor is it impossible that, as time advances and knowledge increases, the remaining errors, or most of them, and all other difficulties for which as yet no satisfactory solution has been discovered, may be explained. In any event, the authority of the Bible with respect to moral and spiritual ends, which constitutes its declared object, will remain undisturbed. It is in the light of this purpose that the Scriptures are to be studied and interpreted. Entering upon the study of the Bible with a sympathetic and reverent spirit, one will be surprised at the rapidity with which difficulties vanish, and will perceive the absurdity of the dictum that one must believe everything within its lids or expose one's soul to the peril of everlasting perdition. There are good and sufficient reasons for accepting the Word of God as we have it, but that is by no means the condition of salvation. The one and only condition of salvation is repentance and faith—

repentance, or a turning from sin in full purpose of heart and faith, or a turning to Jesus Christ in obedience and trust.

2. Not a few misconceptions respecting the Bible would be removed by an intelligent recognition of the method which God employed in revealing himself and his will to men. This method was to adapt himself to human conditions and limitations. From time to time, and with gradually increasing clearness, he made known his will through "holy men of old," who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." This he did in connection with the circumstances and as growing out of the needs of the times in which the Scripture writers lived. Sometimes this revelation had reference to local and temporary conditions, sometimes great principles of universal application were set forth, yet all had direct or indirect relation to God's ultimate purpose of human redemption. It was made in its completeness in the fulness of time, or when the world was ripe for it, in the person of God's Son, Jesus Christ. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son," who was "the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance" (Heb. 1: 1-3). In the Bible we have an authentic account or record of this gradual or progressive revelation of God to men.

The men through whom God thus spoke in different periods were of differing occupations, temperaments and degrees of culture. These differences are manifest in the literary quality and style of their utterances or writings. Thus there is a human element in the Bible as well as a divine. Its origin was from above, in the thought and purpose of God, but its composition was upon earth, grew out of earthly conditions, and was by men of like passions with ourselves. This assertion is not entirely in harmony with the view that the Bible, as we have it, even our English version of it, with its headings and divisions into

chapters and verses, came directly and unchanged from the hand of God. Yet with all their differences and peculiarities, each of these men spoke or wrote under the impulse of the divine Spirit. This insured the marvelous unity of the Scriptures in moral and spiritual matters, in spite of diversity of authorship and the topics under consideration.

So far as known, no one of the original documents of the Scriptures in which this revelation of God is embodied is now in existence, yet so many copies of them were made from time to time before the invention of printing, and preserved, that it is possible without difficulty, and in spite of any slight errors which may have accidentally crept in through the transcribing processes, to determine the original text especially of the New Testament with an almost assured certainty. Whether there were or were not errors in the original documents themselves, it is of course impossible to know.

It has been the work of men to divide the Bible into chapters and verses. Although these divisions are not in every instance strictly natural or logical, no serious inconvenience has followed from this. From time to time translations of the Bible from the Greek and Hebrew tongues, in which it was originally written, into other languages have appeared. Some of these translations have become historic. Though not always entirely accurate in every particular, they have, as linguistic knowledge increased, brought us closer and closer to the mind of God. The revision, in recent years, of the common English or King James' version, is an advance upon all previous translations, and, although there is still room for improvement, this revision is a great work, and its value will be more and more appreciated as the years pass. The lack of anything in the printed page of the old version to indicate the poetic sections in which the Bible abounds is in part, though not entirely, remedied in the new version.

3. A recognition of the principle of the gradualness

or the progressive character of God's revelation of moral and spiritual truth to men would furnish a key to the solution of many of the so-called moral difficulties of the Bible.

The claim made by some is that the Old Testament teaches and endorses slavery, polygamy, and other great evils. Such charges as these have proved an embarrassment to many Christian people, have often been stumbling-blocks to honest seekers after the truth, and have furnished occasion for sneering criticism and contempt of the Bible on the part of many of its foes.

But what consistency or common sense is there in applying the standards of our age, with its noon-day blaze of sunlight upon moral questions, to the conduct of men who lived thousands of years ago in a dim moral twilight? The race in its infancy was not prepared to receive or appreciate the full disclosure of moral and spiritual truth, any more than the children of a family in their immaturity can do so now. Men in the early period of the race were but children in moral and spiritual things, and this fact was taken into account in all God's dealings with them. This is made plain in the Old Testament record. For a long time it was necessary to overlook many things in men's conduct which would not be passed by when they were more mature. The times of that early ignorance, we are told, God "winked at," i. e., took little notice of, as wise parents overlook many things in their very young children, which they would not disregard in the case of those older and more mature. This was precisely God's method of dealing with his ancient people in their moral childhood. Many of the evils which existed, and which could not be uprooted at once, were overlooked until the people were more enlightened, or until the fulness of time should come, when he would make and they would receive the full revelation of himself and his will in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Then their evil ways would no longer be passed by. Then they would everywhere be

commanded to repent. In the light of this principle of the gradualness of revelation, and this from necessity, we can see how there might be a seeming endorsement of evils, when in reality there was none whatever.

Slavery and polygamy, those twin evils, once existed nearly everywhere. They could not be done away at a single stroke, any more than can the evils of intemperance and the liquor-traffic now. But laws were made to restrain, restrict and mitigate these evils, in the confident expectation that the development of higher ideas and a better sentiment among men, which were even then germinating, would in time, of themselves, work their overthrow. They were not endorsed or encouraged at all. They were only tolerated for the time being, because of the hardness of men's hearts. Time was required for their overthrow then, as is the case with prevailing evils now.

Coming to New Testament times, we find that Christ did not attack the evils of his day directly. He did that which was wiser and better. He inculcated such ideas and principles as would of themselves work their overthrow in due time. He thus quietly laid dynamite trains, as it were, under slavery, kingcraft, priestcraft, and all forms of oppression, and these have been exploding all along the centuries, overwhelming one evil after another, as they are doing to-day, and as they will continue to do until every evil is destroyed.

Thus, instead of upholding slavery, polygamy and other evils, the whole tenor of the teachings of the Bible, and the entire spirit of it, are in deadly hostility to them all. As a matter of fact, wherever the Bible has been received and its principles have been free to assert themselves, it has been the mightiest of all agencies in undermining and destroying evil of every kind.

4. It is important to remember that while, in unity of aim and spirit, the Bible is but one book, it is, at the same time, in reality, a library of books. For the most part,

each of these books is separate and distinct from all the rest. Hence, in order clearly to understand them, each must be studied by itself, in its historical settings and connections. This is especially true of such books as the epistles of the New Testament and the prophetic books of the Old Testament. The former are letters written by Paul and his associates. They grew out of conditions and needs then existing. In such circumstances, it is plain that some acquaintance with those conditions is essential to throw light upon their contents and upon various allusions in them.

The same is true of the prophetic books. A knowledge of the circumstances would not only render much that is now unintelligible in them plain, it would also do much to clear away existing misconceptions in regard to their significance and application. They are made up largely of discourses or sermons, or condensed reports of them, delivered by the prophets whose names they bear. These discourses related, primarily, to the times and circumstances in which the author lived, and were called out by those circumstances. The prophets were men of their own times, and were actively related to the events of their times. They were far less concerned about the remote future than they were about matters then present. Their main function was not to foretell events. It was rather to teach, to call men to repentance, and to instruct them in righteousness. They interpreted the providences of God as related to their nation, and warned the people against his judgments. Many of these prophets were, in reality, religious statesmen, and their discourses were political discourses delivered from a religious point of view.

The purely predictive element in the prophetic writings is much smaller than is commonly supposed. Least of all was there any attempt on the part of the writers to unveil the entire future history of the world, or to set forth in minute detail the events of far distant ages. Yet there are those who insist that this is the case, notably so

with the book of Daniel. They declare, among other things, that from its symbolisms and figures the time of the Second Advent and the end of the world may be accurately determined—something which Christ himself, when on earth, explicitly declared was beyond his own knowledge. It would seem that the repeated and long-continued ill success of such interpretations would finally discourage further attempts of this character. The prophets were always looking forward to a better state of things. They picture an ideal condition of society which was to be increasingly realized. They were in the best sense optimistic. They believed that righteousness would finally triumph. These anticipations more and more centered in a Person, the Messiah, who would appear in the fulness of time, by whom this new and better order of things would be inaugurated, and through whom the exalted spiritual blessings which had long been promised to the descendants of Abraham would be imparted. Some of these predictions respecting the Messiah were fulfilled at the time of his first advent; others remain to be fulfilled in connection with his promised second coming. The fact of a second coming is clearly taught. The time and mode of it are simply matters of speculation.

5. Not a few misconceptions respecting the Bible would be corrected by a recognition of the distinction, which is often overlooked, between clearly taught Scripture facts, on the one hand, and human theories, or attempted explanation of these facts, on the other. Many things are set forth as facts in the Word of God without explanation, just as we find great facts in nature, like the growing grass and the manifestation of life, which are unexplained, and which are perhaps unexplainable. Men have never ceased to theorize, as is their privilege, about such Biblical facts as the atonement, inspiration, the future life, but the Bible is by no means responsible for these speculations. The facts themselves are unchanging, yet men's theories respecting those facts have undergone re-

peated modifications; just as the stars above have remained essentially the same through the ages, while human speculations about them have been subject to constant fluctuations.

There are, for example, various historical theories in regard to the fact of Christ's atonement. No one of these theories, by itself, may be entirely satisfactory, although there is doubtless an important element of truth in each of them, but all combined may be necessary in order to afford a full and rounded view of the great fact. Still, the fact itself of an atonement by Jesus Christ for sinful men, whatever the explanation, remains as the unvarying declaration of the Word of God.

How men have theorized and speculated about the fact of inspiration! Many of these theories have now become obsolete, and it may be that the final and satisfactory explanation of this fact is yet to be formulated. But the fact itself of inspiration remains as one of the explicit declarations of Scripture.

Again, the Bible declares certain momentous things in regard to the future life, but it nowhere gives a detailed explanation of the nature of the blessedness or the woe which awaits men in the world to come. It is to human speculation respecting the future, rather than to the plain, unvarnished statements of Scripture, that much misconception and confusion of mind have been due. So of certain theories, whose day, however, seems now to have passed, in regard to a possible probation after death for men who die unrepentant. A little careful examination of the Bible itself would have disclosed how extremely slight the grounds are for any such hope for the persistently wicked. Liberty to speculate is one of the privileges of all, but to promulgate theories which are calculated to raise unwarranted hopes in the minds of sinful men, or to lead them to neglect so great a salvation as Christ offers, is a serious responsibility for any one to assume.

Men's understanding of Scripture, with its great unchanging facts, has been gradually enlarging. Hence the utter unfairness of holding up to ridicule the creeds and statements of past generations, as illustrating the prevailing opinion among intelligent Christian people to-day in regard to the Bible. Were the distinction of which we have been speaking, viz., as between unchanging Scripture facts and fluctuating human theories and speculations respecting these facts, always kept in mind, it would relieve a vast deal of mental confusion in regard to this and to many other questions relating to the Bible.

6. The existence of mysteries in the sacred Word is sometimes made the ground of objection to its acceptance. But the fact of mysteries in the Bible should no more cause men to stumble or hinder them from receiving or acting upon that in it which is plain—and the great bulk of Scripture teaching is perfectly plain—than the fact of mysteries in other realms of knowledge prevents them from recognizing and from utilizing such facts in them as have been established.

We know, for instance, comparatively little in regard to astronomy, and there is much which is mysterious in regard to light, electricity, and in many branches of science. Yet men are not deterred by this fact from recognizing as valid and from applying to various practical ends that which in any of these sciences is clearly known. Hence the telegraph, the telephone, the compass, photography, the trolley, and a thousand other agencies of convenience and of progress. No more should the fact of mysteries in the Bible in regard to God and the spiritual realm hinder men from accepting and from acting upon such facts and truths pertaining to their spiritual interests as are clearly revealed therein. It would be strange indeed if we, in our finiteness, should be able to comprehend everything pertaining to an infinite God. If the Bible assumed to make everything absolutely plain concerning God, this fact of itself might well lead us to hesitate to acknowledge it as of divine origin.

In reality, it is no more necessary that the Bible should be divested of all mystery before the benefits of salvation may be derived from it than it is essential for one to comprehend all the facts in regard to bread and bread-making before one can have his hunger appeased. It is well enough to inform oneself in regard to the composition of bread and the philosophy of bread-making, but if one is hungry and starving the bread itself is the all-important thing. The explanation of any mystery connected with the making of bread is of minor consequence entirely.

So we may gather comfort, inspiration, salvation, from much in Scripture which is not fully explained. This is true, for instance, of the great facts upon which the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity is based; of the unexplainable facts relating to Christ's person, his dual nature, human and divine; of the transcendent fact of his atoning work; and this whether we are or are not able to formulate or to grasp the philosophy of these mysteries. By walking in the way of life, as shown to us in the Scriptures, we may attain to everlasting blessedness, and this whether we do or do not comprehend the nature and mode of the inspiration of the Scriptures. One may experience the new birth, with all the infinite blessings involved in it for this life and the next, even though the wind of the Spirit blow where it listeth and we can not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, any more than could Nicodemus. We may accept and act upon the Scripture teaching concerning prayer, its reality, and its answer, and find richest satisfaction in so doing, whether we are or are not able to give the true philosophy of prayer. The inscrutable mysteries of God's providence may baffle all our efforts at understanding them; nevertheless, accepting the assurance that "To them that love God all things work together for good," we may go courageously forward through life, with its trying ordeals, confident that all our interests for time and eternity are secure in him. We may thank God for the

facts, whether we can or cannot grasp them fully, or fathom their significance, and rejoice in the rich blessings which they were designed to confer, both in this life and the life to come.

It is a misconception, therefore, in regard to the Bible, to assume that the fact of unexplained mystery in it constitutes a valid reason for rejecting it, or for failure to act in accordance with such of its instructions as are plain.

7. A better understanding of the relationship between the doctrine of inspiration and that of revelation would relieve much confusion of mind respecting the Bible.

The doctrine of inspiration has always been held to be important, sometimes all-important; sometimes, in fact, everything in regard to the Christian faith has been made to hinge upon it. It has even been thought that, if the traditional view of inspiration cannot be maintained, the entire Bible, with all its precious contents, is gone. But Christian thought has been undergoing modification upon this point. The question of revelation has come to the front, and is now recognized as of relatively greater importance than that of inspiration. The question is whether God has ever really made himself known in human history; whether the great events which lie at the basis of Christianity ever actually occurred, and whether the records of these events as given in the Scriptures are to be relied upon. These are the really vital inquiries. It is upon such considerations as these, primarily, rather than upon the doctrine of inspiration, that the claims of Christianity as a revealed religion turn. If it is true that God has made himself known to men progressively through the ages; if the facts gathering about the name of Jesus Christ are historic, and the authors of the Bible were really credible witnesses of these facts—all of which seem to be the settled conviction of Christian scholars—the Scriptures are entitled to belief upon grounds entirely apart from the question of their inspiration. This being the case, even if the doctrine of inspiration could not be

maintained, there would still be no real occasion for calling in question the essential facts and doctrines of the Word of God. The solid ground of our confidence in the Bible is not in the doctrine of inspiration, but rather in the historically and experimentally attested fact of revelation which is therein recorded. While inspiration as a reality has never been questioned by the Church, there has never been entire agreement as to the philosophy or explanation of it. As a consequence, frequent modifications or readjustments of men's statements or theories in regard to it have always been necessary. Hence, to base one's faith upon the doctrine of inspiration alone, or primarily, is to occupy very dangerous ground, and to expose oneself to constant embarrassment.

Yet, while we emphasize the greater relative importance of the doctrine of revelation, we are by no means to underestimate or to disparage the doctrine of inspiration. It is important to fix the distinction between inspiration and revelation clearly in mind, since not a little misconception grows out of failure to recognize it. Revelation is vital to the very existence of Christianity. Inspiration is not vital to it, but it has most important ends of its own within the sphere of revelation. If there is doubt as to the fact of divine revelation in the interest of human redemption, it is in vain to talk about inspiration. The latter is really a doctrine for believers only, to whom it is calculated to bring encouragement, comfort, help.

The fact itself of inspiration, or that the writers of the Bible were moved by the Spirit of God the better to fit them for their high function, is made plain both by their own consciousness of it, which they frequently declared, and by their writings, the product of their inspiration. For the Bible clearly transcends unaided human power. It stands alone, without a rival, among the books of the world. In its loftiness of aim, in its wisdom, in its ideals, in the great character which is its central figure,

in the hopes it opens to men for the future, it towers infinitely above them all. It alone provides a remedy for human sin. It bears upon its very face the marks of divine inspiration.

But while the fact of inspiration is not to be questioned, there are wide differences of opinion as to its nature, and the mode and degree of the divine inbreathing. Perhaps an exact definition of inspiration, including all the facts in the case, may not be possible. Certain it is that no statement or theory in regard to it has ever yet met with universal or general acceptance. Yet some things in regard to it are plain. One is, that it was the writers who were inspired, rather than their writings. This explains the wide diversity in their productions. Their individuality remained unchanged. Inspiration did not affect that. One person might be more fully under the influence of the Spirit than another, or might be more so at one time than at another. Thus, there were different degrees of inspiration. This is evident from their writings. A greater degree of inspiration was required, for instance, to produce Isaiah than the Chronicles; the Gospel according to John than the story of Ruth; the Epistle to the Romans than the history of the Kings; yet the general principle of inspiration pertains to all the Scripture writers, and so, in a secondary sense, to the whole Bible.

As to the object of this divine inbreathing or inspiration, it was clearly for moral and spiritual ends. It was to aid men in giving a correct record of God's progressive revelation to mankind, helping them to determine or to interpret the providential significance of events, and to make plain the truth of God respecting human redemption. It was to make men wise unto salvation. This is the distinctive feature of the Bible. It makes plain the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, and presents the loftiest motives to induce men to accept it. Still further, the object of this inspiration of the Bible writers was to

enable them to furnish nourishment for the spiritual life and character of those who might receive the truth, and so equip them for effective service.

Men were inspired, the Bible was given to point out the way of salvation, to present motives to influence men to walk in it, and to nourish and sustain them spiritually while doing so. This is brought out clearly in 2 Tim. 3: 16: "Every Scripture inspired by God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

This high aim is steadily kept in mind by all the Bible writers; this increasing purpose runs all through the sacred Word from beginning to end. The doctrine of inspiration is thus seen to be important within the sphere of revelation, and was designed primarily to promote the spiritual good of believers. The doctrine of revelation is all-important, and vital to Christianity; the doctrine of inspiration has important ends of its own within the sphere of revelation. Thus we see how a recognition of this distinction helps to remove misconceptions in regard to the Scriptures.

8. A final point to be noticed is this, that the true criterion by which to judge of the practical value of the Bible, and by which to determine whether its influence is or is not favorable to human progress, is the character of the effects it produces. In other words, it is to be judged by its fruits.

Perhaps there are no better fields in which to estimate its influence than those lands where it has been introduced in modern times, where it was unknown or unheard-of before, where society was at the lowest point, where generations had been passed in degraded barbarism. What has been the effect of the Bible in these lands, or wherever in them it has been received? Ask fair-minded, observant travelers, ask the hundreds of missionaries from Christian lands who have gone abroad to introduce

it, often at the peril of health and of life itself, under the impulse and inspiration of its spirit and teachings. Their uniform testimony is, as appears in their published letters, in their books and public addresses, that it has always wrought a moral transformation among the people in so far as it has been accepted and made the rule of life; that man's social condition has improved in every respect; that great evils have been done away, many of them, like polygamy, having been shamed almost out of existence; that sanctity has been given to the marriage relation; that the home has been purified and ennobled; that woman has been lifted out of her degradation; that an impulse has been given to intellectual development, and a love for learning fostered; that it has caused churches and schools to spring up, and the debasing practices of barbarism to give place to a Christian civilization; that the natives of these lands have gradually become virtuous, industrious, peaceable, self-respecting people. These are facts, well authenticated, incontrovertible, and these results have been brought about by the Bible and the Christianity which it inculcates. They are the fruits by which the tree is to be judged.

Time would fail to tell of what it has done for the cause of education under this same influence, giving to the world schools, colleges and universities; what it has done for literature, the libraries of the world fairly groaning, as they do, under the literary works of Christian men; what it has done for science, it being in Bible lands that it makes the greatest progress; what it has done for suffering humanity, its humane institutions studding the earth as the stars spangle the heavens; what it has done for commerce and trade, for the overthrow of great evils, for human advancement generally. Time would fail to tell of what it has done for particular nations, as for Scotland, the most Bible-loving country in the world; for Prussia, since the days of Luther; for the Waldenses in their mountain fastnesses; for every land, in fact,

which has opened its doors to its reception. Said Andrew Jackson in his last illness, pointing to the Bible: "That is the rock upon which our republic rests." General Grant, the soldier President, once said: "The Bible is the sheet-anchor of our liberties, and to which we must look as our guide for the future." When an African prince, who had been sent for the purpose, inquired of Queen Victoria as to the foundation of England's greatness, she handed him a copy of the Bible, saying, "That is the secret of my country's greatness;" and history abundantly establishes the fact that the Bible has ever been the cause of true national greatness.

The writer's first Sabbath on the continent of Europe happened to be spent in Paris. It was the Fourth of July, and it could well have been believed that a Fourth of July celebration was in progress in some large city at home. It was a grand holiday. The people were out in holiday attire, and were giving themselves to festivities of every description, not to say gross immoralities. All the places of amusement were open, and were well filled by old and young alike. It was a thoroughly secular day, noisy and somewhat disorderly. There was no sanctity, no quiet. France is not a country of a free Bible, and in Paris its influence is hardly perceptible.

How striking the contrast in Edinburgh, where another Sabbath was spent! The day was one of quiet. A holy hush seemed to rest over the city. Places of amusement and of business were, as a rule, closed. As the morning bells called the people to the sanctuary, they might everywhere be seen wending their ways to their accustomed places of worship, to listen to the preaching of the truth, and to engage in the study of God's Word. In those countries where the Bible is most widely circulated and its influence is most pervasive, good order, respect for law, intelligence, and progress among the people, with the absence of poverty and vice, were most conspicuous. In those lands, on the other hand, where the Bible is least

known, or entirely unheard-of, shiftlessness, vice and general degradation were apparent. The home is impure, and woman little honored. These are significant facts. We are to judge the Bible by its fruits.

The authentic story of the ship *Bounty*, of two or three generations ago, illustrates the influence of the Bible for good in a direct and forcible way. The ship had been sent from England to the Pacific. After it reached its destination, a mutiny broke out, and the officers were set adrift in a small boat upon the open sea, from which they were rescued a number of weeks afterward, nearer dead than alive. The mutineers, now in full control of the ship, soon quarreled among themselves. At length they steered for the Society Islands, which they reached in due time. Later, a part of them, taking with them wives from among the natives, sailed away to find some place where they might spend their remaining days secure from the knowledge and intrusion of their fellow men. They came to the Pitcairn Islands, landed, destroyed the ship, and made for themselves a home. It was not long before bitter, furious quarrels arose and several bloody murders occurred. A fearful, terrible state of things prevailed for a long time. Finally the leader, remembering that there were some Bibles among the ship's stores which had been preserved, procured one and began to read and study it faithfully. He became deeply interested in it, and through its influence was soundly converted. He began to teach it and caused it to be taught to the other members of the mutinous settlement. A transformation was soon apparent throughout the entire community. Quarrels ceased. A spirit of kindness and good will began to reign. Public worship was regularly maintained, altars were set up, and prayer ascended from every home. A standard of morality was maintained which would put many of our best communities to the blush.

A few years later the islands were visited by English

vessels. From time to time thereafter, reports were carried back to England of the condition of affairs on these islands which brought surprise and astonishment to every one. These reports were published, are on record, and have been verified repeatedly by more recent voyagers. What is more, that little community, numbering now between one and two hundred, is a Christian community of high grade, a moral oasis in the midst of a desert waste. This has been the direct result of the influence of the Bible. It can be traced to no other source. It admits of no other explanation. The people themselves acknowledge it. This shows beyond a peradventure, and in circumstances which render any other explanation impossible, the marvelous power of the simple Scriptures to promote the moral elevation of men, their progress, their well-being in every respect. The Bible is to be judged by its fruits.

### III

#### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

That the enemies of the Bible should misrepresent it and pervert its teachings is not strange. That they should seek to discredit it and to undermine its influence in every possible way, is only what is to be expected. This purpose, with unwearied persistence, they have long sought to carry out.

It would be reason for congratulation if this open hostility were the only obstacle which the Bible is obliged to encounter. Yet while the Bible is abused by its enemies, it is not free from abuse on the part of its friends. Through misconceptions respecting its nature and aim, through faulty interpretations of its meaning, and through uses of its contents which are entirely unwarranted, erroneous impressions of the Bible are conveyed to others, prejudices against it are aroused, and its real teachings are obscured.

Sometimes, for example, the mere material of the book itself, the paper on which it is printed, is regarded with a reverence akin to worship, as if this were equally sacred with the divine message itself, or even with the supreme object of devotion. This is bibliolatry, and why is not book-worship by a Protestant as pernicious as the adoration of the host or the worship of the Virgin by the Romanist?

Again, not infrequently the Bible has been employed as a book of magic, as if it had the mysterious power of determining important questions by the passages which happen to meet the eye as it is opened at random. But wherein does this use of the Scriptures differ, in principle,

from many of the forms of divination which were anciently practiced? If certain persons have supposed themselves to be providentially guided, in time of trouble, by the passages which first struck their eye, what real reason have they for this belief, or for making the practice which they themselves follow a rule for others?

By others still, though less frequently now than in the past, the Bible has been employed to oppose discoveries in science, or philosophy, or progress in theological thought. Galileo was silenced by the authorities of the Roman Catholic Church, who then quoted the Bible against the theory of the revolution of the earth around the sun. This use of Scripture springs from an entire misconception as to its purpose and scope.

Sometimes, again, it has been thought that in the words and letters of Scripture, in the structure of its sentences, in its symbolism, in its numbers, in its seeming coincidences, all sorts of mystic meanings lie concealed; that they furnish data for determining the time of the second advent or the end of the world. It has also been asserted that the minute fulfilment of prophecy may be established in the events which are occurring from day to day. These misconceptions are due to a failure to understand some of the most common principles of Biblical interpretation, or to perceive the real nature and function of prophecy.

Again, the Bible has been greatly abused by the indiscriminate use of proof-texts; by making important doctrines to hinge upon sentences taken out of their connection, while a score or more of other and modifying passages are utterly ignored; by the literal interpretation of the figurative language in which the Bible abounds; by reading most fanciful and far-fetched meanings into the plainest prose; by an entire disregard of the context and the historical setting of passages, in the light of which alone their true significance can be determined, and their proper application be made.

In these and other ways the Bible has suffered at the

hands of its friends, as well as of its enemies. The motive in the two instances has been different, but the effects have been similar. By faulty and vicious methods of interpretation; by employing quotations regardless of their connections; by a partisan zeal to sustain some pre-conceived theory or view; or by various other unwarranted uses of the Word of God, its friends are responsible for infinite mischief to the cause of Christ and of truth. It has even become a proverb that anything can be proven from the Bible.

Yet, wonderful as the sacred volume is, marvelous as has been its history, and mysterious as it may be in some of its parts, it is not, after all, so mysterious a book as a whole, or so difficult of apprehension in its essential truths, as to be beyond the easy understanding of the average mind, one might almost say of the average child. It is a book of real life, a people's book, and so plain, for the most part, that he who runs may read. It seems strange indeed that there should be such serious and constant misapprehension of its meaning. This can only be due to the overlooking of simple, natural, common-sense principles of interpretation, which are within the easy grasp of all, and need scarcely more than be mentioned to be appreciated and accepted.

1. One of these principles is, that a passage of Scripture must be studied and interpreted historically, i. e., in the light of the particular circumstances in which it was written; the conditions and usages of society at that time, and the special object and aim which the writer had in view. When the meaning is obvious, or where the truth inculcated is manifestly of universal, rather than of local and temporary application—as, for instance, in the case of the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments, and various moral precepts scattered through the Scriptures—this may not be indispensable. But even here, much can never be fully understood save as the historical settings are taken into account. Some knowledge of the

situation and environment is absolutely essential to throw light upon the meaning, just as in the case of other ancient writings containing allusions to customs then prevalent, and to modes of thought then current, but altogether different from those with which we, in our times, are familiar. Yet many overlook this. They seem to regard the Bible as having been let down, all at once and complete, out of heaven, all parts of it as equally important, and equally applicable to all ages, to all people, and in all circumstances, while such a thing as a human element in it, or as progress in the unfolding of truth through the long period embraced in its composition, is entirely ignored.

As a matter of fact, the books composing the Bible were written at different periods, the writers were men of their own times, who wrote primarily with reference to the events and needs of the age in which they lived. Although they wrote as moved by the Holy Spirit, each at the same time wrote in his own peculiar style. His individuality had full play. Frequently, existing customs and matters then current were referred to without explanation, as if every one could understand them, and as those addressed of course did, but as we may not.

Take, for instance, any of the epistles of the New Testament, like the one to the Christians of Galatia, or Philippi, or one of those to Timothy. They were informal letters, written in view of the special conditions and needs of the particular church or person addressed. Paul may have never dreamed of their being preserved and read centuries later. In them, various prevailing errors, with which we of to-day are but little if at all familiar, were considered and corrected. There are allusions to matters and things purely local, with directions what to do in this or that special case, with which we have little concern. Mingled with all is more or less doctrinal instruction, not in the way of formal statement, but as related to the particular end which the writer had

in view. In such circumstances, would it be at all surprising if a person eighteen hundred years later, trained in an entirely different state of things, should, in reading one of these letters, here and there come upon passages and allusions difficult to be understood?

It is only as one is able in a measure to put oneself back in imagination into the times when the author wrote, with an understanding of the situation and surroundings and what he was aiming at, that we can determine the real meaning of obscure passages, or of an epistle as a whole. Then the significance becomes plain. Then it is seen that some things were intended for temporary application only, for a single church or a person, and that they have no application or binding force now, while other things are clearly of the nature of general principles, which are of permanent and universal application. The famous passage in regard to women keeping silent in the churches, studied in this way, is found to be a direction only for the time when it was written, and possibly for the particular community addressed. For this, sufficient reason was found in the state of society then and there existing, a state which does not prevail in Christian lands to-day.

One of the first and most important principles of Biblical interpretation, then, is that of studying the Bible in its historical settings, or in the light of the circumstances in which its various parts were written.

2. A second principle, logically following the first, is to take the language of Scripture in its plain and most obvious meaning. If a passage is manifestly figurative or poetical, as much of Scripture is, or if a literal meaning would be at variance with its evident scope, or inconsistent with the nature of things, other principles of interpretation must enter in, just as in the interpretation of figurative, poetic and exceptional kinds of writing in other literature. But the general rule is, to take the language of Scripture, most of which is the language of



common life, as it stands, in its plain, most obvious meaning.

Yet there is a tendency with some, as appears in various publications, in many Scriptural expositions, in Bible readings especially, to draw out strange, novel, unheard-of meanings from the simplest passages of Scripture, or to read into them other meanings equally strange and unnatural, of which their authors never dreamed. It is not at all impossible that a partisan zeal in behalf of some favorite view or pet theory may lead one to imagine that he sees support for it where, in reality, none whatever exists. One cannot doubt that Paul would be greatly astonished and mortified if he knew all the fanciful meanings, the strained arguments, and the forced interpretations which have been evolved from his writings during the centuries.

More errors, probably, have arisen from pushing figurative expressions to an extreme, from literalizing them, than from any other single cause. Against this tendency the Bible student needs to be on constant guard, since such expressions are very common, particularly in some of the prophets and in Revelation. What exaggerated, mischievous ideas, for instance, many have gained of the future world, from a literal interpretation of the figurative expressions in the Apocalypse! Heaven is made to be literally a city foursquare, with walls great and high, built of actual jasper, and with foundations of all manner of tangible precious stones, its gates of real pearl, its streets of pure gold, while angels without number, in white though scant attire, and with great, ungainly, ill-adjusted wings, as in pictorial representations, are all the time making beautiful music upon actual golden harps, and singing with voices most exquisitely trained. The other place, too, is literally a bottomless pit, or an actual lake of fire burning with real sulphurous brimstone.

Unquestionably these figures stand for tremendous realities, for facts of future blessedness, answering to our

highest conceptions, on the one hand, and of future endless woe on the other. In either case, human language seems, to the writers, to be inadequate to express the reality without the aid of startling figures. Yet these literal interpretations of that which is manifestly figurative, particularly the lurid representations of the doom of the wicked, have led many to distrust God's goodness and to deny the Bible altogether, when the real facts or truths themselves, for which the figures stand, might have been accepted without hesitation. We know very little in detail about the blessedness or the woe of the future, while the facts themselves stand out from the teachings of the Word with unmistakable clearness.

But if the practice of literalizing and materializing the figurative and poetic language is harmful, so, on the other hand, is the too common practice of spiritualizing ordinary plain statements. In this way the most artificial and unheard-of meanings and applications are evolved, especially from the books of Daniel and Revelation, and in fact from the whole history of the Jewish economy and Jewish ritual, where every ribbon and every nail is made to typify some profound spiritual truth. And what unreal, unnatural expositions of Scripture are sometimes given! What a magical book the Bible must be, and how unfortunate that so few are privileged to possess the key to its curious and hidden meanings!

Both these extremes are to be avoided. The great bulk of Scripture is to be interpreted according to the natural, common-sense method, taking the language as it stands, prose as prose, and poetry as poetry, regarding it in the light of the circumstances in which it was written, treating it as we would any other ancient book.

It is related that some years ago, in a circle of clergymen near Boston, there was a discussion as to the true meaning of the words of our Lord in Matt. 18:6. After most of those present had expressed their opinions, differing widely in their interpretations, the late Dr. Mason,

a wise and reverent scholar, said, when it came his turn to speak: "Brethren, I've thought over this passage a good deal, and it seems to me its meaning can be best expressed in about these words" (and he repeated the text slowly and with marked emphasis), "'Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.'" That closed the discussion. Many other disputed texts of the Bible would gain light through a similar exegesis.

3. A third principle of Bible interpretation is that of comparing Scripture with Scripture. One portion is to be understood or interpreted only in harmony with every other portion bearing upon the same subject. No one part or text is to be taken by itself as the sole support of a great doctrine, or for the enforcement of some important duty. Its relations to all other portions and to the whole must also be considered, while it must not be forgotten that the revelation of God is progressive.

As a matter of fact, it is rarely that any Bible writer attempts to present all aspects of a great truth at once. One brings out the phase of it which may suit his purpose at the time, another brings out another. Each regards it from a particular point of view, or for a particular purpose. In order to a complete view, therefore, all the passages bearing upon the subject must be brought together, and their different or partial representations must be combined. For example, the many-sided doctrine of the atonement is presented in the New Testament by different writers, for different purposes, in several different yet not inconsistent aspects, or by the same writer on different occasions, which shows that no one mode of speech can fully comprehend or set it forth. Yet bitter theological battles have been fought over the doctrine, and one reason has been that each of the numerous parties to the controversy has adopted some one of

these modes of representation as if that set forth the whole truth, instead of combining them all before forming a judgment as to the real teaching of Scripture. Each theory announced has had some truth in it, but no single theory has covered the whole case. As no one can look at all sides of a mountain at once, but must go round it again and again to obtain a correct impression of its majesty and beauty, so the various aspects of fundamental Scripture doctrines must be carefully considered and combined before we form definite and final conclusions as to any one of them.

The conversation between Christ and the tempter in the wilderness is very suggestive in this connection, emphasizing the need which we are urging of comparing Scripture with Scripture. The devil quoted from it in support of his propositions. Christ did not deny the quotations, but by themselves they did not give the whole truth on the subject. So when the tempter said, "It is written" thus and so, he said, "Again it is written," and brought in the corrective of other passages, their complement, or the conditions of their fulfilment. Similarly now, if one thing is found written somewhere in Scripture, we must also consider whether some modifying or completing passage may not be written somewhere else. The necessity of this balancing of different statements is especially seen in studying such a topic as the person of Christ. On the one hand, it is declared, in many passages, that he was human, a man like other men; but it is written again, in many other passages, that he was also divine.

We must hold to what all the passages combined teach. Christ was clearly both human and divine. So in regard to the sovereignty of God and the free agency of man. Each is a half-truth or a half-hinge. Both are clearly taught. But the Calvinist has given special prominence to the sovereignty half-hinge, the Arminian to the free-agency half-hinge. Hence the controversies, and each side only half right.

The true method of Bible study, therefore, is that of comparing Scripture with Scripture, or what is called the inductive method, such as is employed by the man of science, who, in the study of nature, first gathers together his facts and illustrations and then deduces from them some general principle applicable to all. Thus from the accumulated facts of vegetable life, the science of botany has been evolved. Out of the strata of the earth and the facts gathered from its study, the science of geology is being developed. Out of the phenomena of the heavens, the science of astronomy is unfolding. So the passages or statements of Scripture bearing upon a given subject, like the atonement, the person of Christ, or the future life, must be brought together, studied in connection with the context in each case, then arranged and classified. Each must be given its proper weight. What the uninspired friends of Job say, for instance, is not to have the same weight as what Christ and the apostles say. The general truths or principles which Scripture as a whole manifestly teaches, must be deduced. This gives a full, rounded view. From neglect of this common-sense principle, great heresies have sprung up, each heresy containing something of truth, but only a partial or half-truth, and that mixed with error. All this would have been avoided, or largely so, by a careful employment of this inductive method of comparing Scripture with Scripture. This principle has been dwelt upon because of its importance, and because it is so often ignored in the hop, skip and jump methods of Bible study which seem to be so common in Sunday-schools, in Bible readings, sometimes in preaching.

Another important principle of interpretation is that the best results of Christian scholarship of the present and preceding ages should be given due weight. For, while we as Protestants hold firmly to the right of private judgment, and deny the binding force of the decrees or interpretations of any Church, or council, or other body of men,

at the same time we are not at liberty to discard as of no consequence what have been and are the prevailing convictions within the Christian Church. A stream of Biblical interpretation has been flowing down through the centuries, and this has been enlarging, broadening, and growing more clear, as facilities for Bible study have increased. The results of these investigations are easily accessible, and should have their place and their proper influence along with other light which may be available, in any effort to determine what the Scriptures actually teach. To regard all this as valueless is the height of presumption. Hence if one's studies have led him to a radical departure from what may be termed a consensus of evangelical Christian scholarship upon a given point, while this would not necessarily prove him wrong, it would seem clearly to call for careful reconsideration on his part, and modesty, to say the least, in making his claims. His methods may have been defective, or some link in the chain of his reasoning may have been lacking. It is the part of wisdom not to be over-confident, and to be concerned only to learn what the Bible actually teaches upon these important subjects, rather than to go to it for confirmation of preconceived ideas or theories. This can only be effected through a recognition, along with other principles of interpretation, of the inductive method of study, or careful comparison of Scripture with Scripture.

4. A fourth and final general principle, really the most important of all, is this, that the Word of God, written by holy men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, can only be interpreted aright as the same Spirit is in the heart to give spiritual insight. Spiritual things are only spiritually discerned.

We recognize this principle in regard to other interpretations. If we would have nature reveal to us her secrets, if we would understand a beautiful poem, or work of art, or musical composition; if we would draw out and under-

stand the real goodness of a human soul, we must, in all these cases, approach them in a sympathetic, appreciative spirit. This is absolutely essential. Unless we do, nature is a sealed book, and the treasures of literature, art, science, and the human heart, remain locked and impenetrable.

The sacred volume must be approached in a similar way. Otherwise it, also, remains a sealed book. Only to a sympathetic, appreciative spirit will it yield its deepest meanings. It will be responsive to no other. And inasmuch as it is a book of spiritual things, preeminently, and with a spiritual aim, its more profound significance can only be spiritually discerned, or only as the Spirit of God, who moved men to write it, is in the heart. Scripture can never be understood by grammar, logic, rhetoric and history alone. It is only by the Spirit, in addition, or primarily, who takes of these things and shows them to men, that their eyes will really be opened to behold wondrous things out of God's law. This principle has been recognized by the greatest leaders of the Church in all ages. And the more of this Spirit men possess, the more will Scripture be illumined for them, and the more will it be seen to contain. This will not necessarily render one's interpretations infallible, since the medium through which the Holy Spirit operates is imperfect—a man may still be a crank after becoming a Christian. But, generally speaking, the more the Spirit of God is cherished in one's heart, the less liable one is to fall into serious error; the more likely one is to reach the truth. Hence the constant need, in reading and studying the Word of God, of the quickening and illumining presence of the divine Spirit in the heart. This important principle would hardly seem to require elaboration for intelligent Christian people, but it certainly needs a fresh and a constantly renewed emphasis.

We have spoken now of a number of simple yet funda-

mental and essential principles of Biblical interpretation. Recognizing the real object and aim of the Bible, we have pointed to the necessity of studying it historically, considering the settings and the circumstances in which it was written; of giving to its language its natural, proper significance, interpreting prose as prose, and poetry as poetry; of comparing Scripture with Scripture, using the inductive method, and not ignoring the consensus of Christian scholarship; and, finally, the most important of all, of seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit, without whose aid the Bible will forever remain a sealed book, in so far, at least, as its deeper, spiritual, most important teachings are concerned.

Were we to follow these simple principles, we should not go far astray from the meaning of the Bible, and we should be spared many grievous mistakes and misconceptions. Not that all the processes hinted at above are requisite in daily readings in the home, or for spiritual nourishment; a man may be saved and be a useful Christian in spite of immature and defective views; but when it comes to studying with a view to accuracy, or to going beyond the mere surface, or for the sake of instructing others, these fundamental principles of interpretation cannot be left out of the account. If ministers of the gospel, who are supposed to be, and who ought to be, thoroughly familiar with these principles—the a, b, c's, indeed, of any proper preparation for the ministry—and if public Bible teachers, lay or clerical, and all those who are called to give instruction in the Word of God, would only take pains to keep them before the people, line upon line, and precept upon precept, not only would it tend to deepen their hearers' interest in the Bible, render their study of it more intelligent, and help to promote wholesome, well-balanced views of Scripture, but, more effectively than in any other way, would it meet and correct the many misinterpretations which are now so prevalent, and supplant

the vicious methods of exegesis which seems to be in vogue in many quarters.

It is all-important that the revival of Bible study now in progress should be wisely guided, and the responsibility for so doing rests mainly upon intelligent, educated, consecrated, Spirit-filled ministers and laymen.

BOOK II

LIFE



## IV.

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO BEGINNING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

After a person has become a Christian, everything in the new life appears to him to be simple and plain. It seems as if any one might understand it all readily, were such understanding really desired. Yet, as a matter of fact, when one begins seriously to think of entering upon the Christian life, many difficulties present themselves; the way into the new life seems hedged about; one finds himself entangled in a maze of perplexities; there are troubles, distress and darkness on every side. Frequently dreary days and nights are passed; sometimes one is restless and unsettled for weeks, sometimes for months and even years. Never is the mind more active in searching for stumbling-blocks, or more fertile in originating difficulties, than at the threshold of a Christian life. When at length the light appears, one marvels that it should have been so difficult of discovery.

Without stopping to inquire why this is so, whether owing to defective instruction, or to the magnifying of things which are not essential, or simply to the blinding effects of sin, it is wise to notice and if possible try to clear away some of the difficulties and misconceptions which so frequently arise, and some of which are suggested in almost every conversation with inquirers. Those who really desire to enter upon the Christian life—and the number, it is believed, is larger than is generally supposed—ought to be helped to see clearly just what to do, that there may be no delay in taking the step which shall bring them into the Christian life.

1. A common difficulty, indeed, a whole class of diffi-

culties, grows out of a misapprehension respecting the relation of the feelings to the decision which renders one a disciple of Christ. Many say they would like to be Christians, but they have no feeling, or do not feel as they suppose they ought, or as some others seem to feel. They have heard believers describe the despair they had at the time of their conversion; the rapturous joy which they experienced afterwards, of distress followed by relief; the darkness of mind and then the inflashing of light. Such recitals have so often been made that there has come to be an impression with many that such an experience is necessary; and that, because one is unconscious of any such emotional disturbance as others have had, there is nothing to do but to settle back discouraged as if the Christian life were unattainable. Yet there is not a shadow of Scripture authority for conclusions of this sort. To be converted is nowhere represented as a matter of feeling.\* To be born again is nowhere described as an experience of the emotions solely. It is unfortunate that such erroneous impressions prevail so widely.

This matter of emotions, as related to entrance upon Christian life, is secondary and subordinate. The Bible bids us repent, and repentance means vastly more than to feel badly, or to shed a few tears of regret. Emotion over one's past life may accompany repentance, but it is not repentance itself. To repent means to turn squarely about in one's course of life. It means an honest purpose, with God's help, to forsake sin and to live righteously. Repentance primarily is an act of the will. It is to decide to live a right life, a life of fidelity to Christ, in distinction from a wrong life, a life of indifference, or of disobedience and sin. This being the case, one may set out in the Christian course just as calmly and deliber-

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\*In the Revision, it is not stated, "Except ye be converted," but "Except ye turn."

ately as one would carry out any other important decision. All the sorrow which is necessary is just enough to lead one to abandon a wrong life and to choose a right one. So far as we know, James and Peter and John started out in the new life with cool deliberation. We have no account of their waiting for feeling, or of any refusal on their part to act until first overwhelmed with sorrow. When Jesus called them, straightway they left their nets and followed him. The moment they fully decided to cast in their lot with him, they became his followers, his disciples, or, as we say, Christians.

It must not be forgotten that temperaments differ. No two persons are alike. The experiences of no two persons are exactly the same. Some are cool and collected; they never manifest feeling; they are never known to weep. Not that they do not feel, or are not tender and sympathetic, but that they are not in the habit of manifesting by outward signs the inmost state of their hearts. Others, on the contrary, cannot hide their emotions. If happy, they show it; if sad, the fact is not concealed. They are easily moved to tears. Nor is it strange, perhaps, that with them the recollection and realization of past ingratitude and sin, so long continued, should cause bitter tears of sorrow. But unless this sorrow leads to a definite and positive purpose to "cease to do evil," and to "learn to do well," it is of little avail. Yet those who are seldom or never known to weep, and who do not shed a tear when convicted of sin, may be no less sincere than those who do. They may be just as much in earnest, and may prove to be even more steadfast in their purpose to follow the Lord. Thus the mere fact of feeling outwardly exhibited, or the lack of it, counts for little. It is nothing particularly in one's favor; it is nothing necessarily against one. We would not disparage emotion, but instead of being the main thing in conversion, as seems to be imagined by many, it is really secondary and incidental, rather than vital and essential.

It is not regarded as a sufficient excuse for neglecting duty that one does not happen to feel like it. Duty is something to be done, whatever one's feelings may be. Suppose, as has been suggested, a note of yours is due to-morrow at the bank, and a friend who happens to know it and who thinks you may have forgotten it, hurries in just before the close of banking hours to remind you of it. "Oh, yes, I know it," you reply, "and I suppose I ought to go down and pay it. The money is here in my safe and I have been thinking of that note all day, but for some reason I don't feel moved to pay it. I know it will injure my credit to have the note protested, and I suppose I ought to be deeply anxious to pay it, lest failure to do so injure my reputation. But, somehow, I am not. Would it be right for me, feeling as I do, or rather without any feeling at all, to go down to the bank and pay the note?" What would a friend think if he heard one talk in that way? Yet that is precisely the way in which a great many people are talking about meeting an obligation which is even more plain and urgent, viz: that of beginning a life of obedience to God and to duty. If one knows it to be his duty to begin a Christian life, as most people know it to be theirs, it is high time to discharge that duty and begin that life. We should no more wait for feeling than we would in discharging any other known duty.

2. Another difficulty relates to "conviction of sin." How many there are who imagine that before they can really enter upon the Christian life, they must first experience certain peculiar sensations, not simply of sorrow, but of overwhelming distress; that it is only by passing through long and painful conflicts, through agonies of contrition, through gulfs of dark despair, that they can ever emerge into the light, and experience fulness of joy and peace! What is "conviction of sin?" It is being convinced of sin, of one's personal sinfulness, or that one is wrong in one's relations with God, and that there ought

to be an immediate change in one's course of life and attitude toward God. It is not distress, or crying, or tears, or feeling badly at all, although such experiences may and often do attend upon conviction. If one realizes that he is a sinner, and that he ought to change his course and be obedient to God in the future, he is under conviction, and under sufficient conviction to warrant him in becoming a Christian. The distress which is often experienced is not itself conviction, it is simply the result of not yielding to or resisting conviction. One knows that he ought to live differently and he does not do so. He resists his convictions, and naturally his conscience, if at all alive, begins to trouble and distress him. It is the struggle of a proud, unyielding spirit, resisting the pressure of a sense of duty, or of the Holy Spirit who is striving to persuade him to do his duty.

The reason why many people pass through these long and distressful experiences before finding peace of mind is that they are headstrong and obstinate. They are not willing to submit. Their sufferings would have been avoided if only they had at once yielded to their convictions of duty and had promptly begun to be obedient. "When I was a farmer's boy," says a writer on this subject, "I remember once on a stormy night trying to get the sheep, of which I had the care, into a safe shelter. Most of them seemed ready enough to go into the fold, but there was one sheep that would not do so. I tried to call him in, but he stood outside stamping his feet and shaking his head in a very defiant manner. I tried to drive him in, but he would turn suddenly from the narrow entrance and leap past me, and then stand at a little distance and bleat as if he were a deeply injured animal. At last, by masterly strategy, I succeeded in getting him through the door and in fastening it behind him. Once in he seemed to enjoy the fold as much as any other member of the flock." Had an experience-meeting been held among the sheep and this obstinate fellow been per-

suaded to relate his experience, he would have said that he had had a terrible time in getting into the fold; that it was only, in fact, after many struggles of mind, many doubts and fears, and great inward commotion, that he had succeeded in finding the entrance to the fold; but then there followed a great calm, and he was conscious of being filled with joy and peace. Now, the simple cause of all his trouble was obstinacy. This sheep might have gone into the fold quietly as did all the rest of the flock, and thus have been spared his struggles. It would have been far better for him had he done so.

There are many sheep in Christ's fold to-day who have had much the same sort of experience, and for much the same reason. They were obstinate, proud, unwilling to submit their wills to God. They found no peace until they did submit. The better way is to respond promptly to the conviction of duty. We best show our sorrow for past neglect and sin by prompt obedience and faithful living in the present. There are few unconverted persons who have not sufficient conviction to warrant them in beginning the Christian life, and in deciding to begin it at once.

We see, therefore, that this question of the feelings holds a very subordinate relation to the subject under consideration. The vital thing is the decision to begin an obedient life. It is an act of the will. It is a voluntary self-surrender. This is practical repentance; this is practical faith. The yielding or the choosing is the all-important thing. The feelings will take care of themselves.

3. Another obstacle in the way of some, and a common obstacle, too, is dread of the new duties which it is supposed the Christian life will involve. "If I should become a Christian," says one, "I should have to pray in my family, say grace at meals, pray in public, talk with people about their souls, perhaps be a preacher; and this I never could do."

In reply, it may be said, first, that God never lays burdens upon his children which he does not also give strength and help to enable them to bear. Nor, again, does he expect one just born into the kingdom to take up, without preparation, development, or experience, the responsibilities and the burdens which pertain to maturity of Christian life. Here, as elsewhere, the principle of growth is recognized, and it is cherishing a needless anxiety when one begins to think of all the possible duties and cares of the Christian life, and allows this to be a stumbling-block in the way of entering upon it. It is much as if a child should shrink from learning its letters, from dread of essays, declamations, orations, difficult and abstruse problems, which belong to a more advanced stage of education. In a very proper sense here, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." Preparation will have been made for all these responsibilities before they appear, and the wonder then will be that they should ever have been so dreaded. A large proportion of our coming trials in life are imaginary. We worry over them, dread them, and when, at length, if ever, we come to them, they are not at all serious.

Furthermore, many of these so-called duties may not, in reality, be duties at all. Whether they are or are not, may be simply questions of judgment. Each person has to decide for himself, before his own conscience. It is important that people should take part in prayer-meeting, but whether or not it is the duty of this one or that one in particular, each must settle for himself. Whether or not it will become one's duty to become a preacher, if he becomes a Christian, depends upon various considerations which one has nothing to do with at the beginning of his Christian career. It is one's duty to become a Christian, without reference to the question of the ministry, or of any other calling in life. This is to be attended to first of all. A young man once held off

from beginning the Christian life for a long time for this very reason: he feared that if he became a Christian he would have to become a minister. He was told that it was by no means clear that this would be his duty. He might not be adapted to the ministry, but it was very clear that he ought to be a Christian. After some time he came out clearly and decidedly for Christ, went into business, and nothing more was said about the ministry. A few years later, word was received from him to the effect that he was engaged in study at a theological seminary. His feelings had so changed, he said, that now he wanted to preach; he could not be contented in any other calling. Similarly it often is in regard to many other dreaded new duties. If they are duties, they will be made to appear such in due time, and one will be prepared for them. Not only strength to meet them will be provided, but, most likely, one will have an inclination to enter upon them. Fear and dread will give place to real desire.

It was so in the case of a man who told his minister that the reason he had so long remained undecided about beginning the Christian life was the fear and dread he had of supposed new duties which it seemed impossible that he could ever discharge. He knew he ought to be a Christian. His wife and children had all been converted, and he was the only one of the family remaining unconverted. "But," said he, "I know I could never pray in my family or ask a blessing, especially with several of my clerks present. If I could have a man come in and do these things for me, I would willingly give him twelve dollars a month." He was afterward converted. The minister asked him, pleasantly, if he still wanted to hire a man at twelve dollars a month to do his praying for him. "Oh, no," said he, "I can do that myself now." His whole feeling about it had changed. He no longer dreaded to pray before others. He took pleasure in doing so.

The difficulty is, people are all the time trying to cross

bridges before they come to them, multiplying and magnifying difficulties and duties which may or may not appear. The one vital inquiry is whether one will or will not decide to begin the Christian life. That settled in the affirmative, the way will gradually open, all needed grace and strength will be imparted, the mountains will become as mole-hills, the dread will give place to desire. No one need hesitate a moment about beginning the Christian life from dread of any new duties which it is supposed will be involved in so doing.

4. Another difficulty, which is often one of real concern, especially with the young, is in regard to "giving up things," or the self-denial supposed to be involved in the Christian life.

There might be, it is to be admitted, some show of reason for shrinking from the Christian life on the part of those who are young and buoyant, and who are lacking in a full realization of the tremendous interests at stake, were it really true that the Christian life were a life of self-denials merely—the giving up of everything pleasant with nothing to be received in return—did it not present any compensation or open any new sources of satisfaction in itself. Yet even then, were it a life of gloom, of "thou shalt nots," and nothing else, of constant distress, with not a redeeming feature in it, in so far as this life and its enjoyment are concerned, no one could afford to neglect it. It would be for one's highest interests to enter upon it at any cost. It would be worth infinitely more than all the sacrifices involved.

But the Christian life means something more than the giving up of the things we like, something more than the gloomy, joyless experience, which it is often imagined to be. It should never be represented as free from self-denials. The sacrifices it involves should never be concealed. Self-denial is required here, as in the attainment of any other good, although a vast deal of misapprehension prevails in regard to the character and amount

of it. Practices which are clearly sinful and wrong must of course be given up. Other practices, whose moral quality is not so clear, must be left to individual conscience to restrain or lay aside. Sometimes practices which are not absolutely sinful in themselves are to be given up for the sake of others, as when Paul declared that if eating meat, which had been offered to idols—a thing harmless in itself—would cause others weaker in conscience than himself to stumble, he would eat no meat while the world should stand.

If one is really in earnest, more anxious about his soul's welfare than about anything else, as one ought to be, there will be very little difficulty over these questions. One may well suspect himself and his own sincerity if he finds himself really stumbling over the question as to whether he will be obliged to give up this or that in order to be a Christian. If salvation is really the all-important object which we have always been taught to believe it to be, one ought to be willing to surrender anything and everything which would seem in any degree to stand in the way of securing it.

On the other hand—and this is something which is usually overlooked or not appreciated—there are many and vastly better things received in becoming a disciple of Christ than are given up; more than sufficient to counterbalance any regret in parting with them. There is opened to the mind a new set of pleasures. New sources of enjoyment are discovered all along the way of life, just as in certain mountain regions one comes upon springs of water, bubbling up pure and sweet, in most unexpected places. As the mind is taken up with these new Christian experiences, many of the old forms of enjoyment lose their attractiveness. They are outgrown, as the garments of childhood are outgrown and thrown aside, and who ever murmured over the giving up of his outgrown, worn-out, cast-off clothing? The writer once climbed the Lebanon Mountains in Syria. From a dis-

tance they appeared bare and rocky, rugged and cheerless. It seemed as if the ascent, even upon horseback, would be hard and toilsome, an experience to be dreaded. Not an attractive thing was to be seen, although there were some objects of interest on the other side of the range, to see which was the only incentive to the attempt. It seemed as if there could be little satisfaction on the way, but as the struggle upward proceeded, with much winding about between rocky ledges, what were the surprise and delight at discovering little villages, invisible from below, nestling here and there; vineyards, laden with luscious fruit; mulberry and other trees, and a great variety of shrubbery, to say nothing of attractive scenery on every hand! The air was bracing, and there was a magnificent outlook on the country below and upon the blue Mediterranean in the distance, with here and there a sail upon its placid waters. The panorama had beauty entirely unanticipated. The journey proved to be anything but a hardship. It was full of exhilaration and delight. Instead of shrinking from that which remained, there was every incentive to press on, and constant satisfaction all the way.

So the Christian life, looked at from a distance, or regarded merely from an external point of view, may seem like a life of self-denials, of restrictions, of hardships and gloom, but this is because men do not know what it contains; what satisfaction is to be met with on every hand in connection with it; what unexpected delights will be disclosed as they advance. To one who has really entered upon the Christian life in sincerity, there are constant and delightful surprises all the way along. He no longer thinks of the joys beyond as the only incentive to press on; his mind is absorbed with the attractions on the way, while the outlook grows constantly wider, brighter, grander, and the heavenly atmosphere he is breathing is full of exhilaration and of spiritual quickening. One can not know beforehand, can

not understand the joyous exchange, the treasures vast and rich, which he is to receive in return for all the self-denials involved, from incurring which, not unnaturally, there is shrinking, until he actually enters upon the new life. These treasures may not be fully appreciated at once, but they will grow upon the soul, and will be experienced in constantly enlarging measure.

5. A final difficulty, or class of difficulties, to be noticed, grows out of misconception respecting the conditions of salvation. One says, "I would like to become a Christian, but I do not and cannot believe in existing creeds. I don't believe in the doctrine of total depravity, i. e., that men are by nature as bad as they can be. I don't believe in a literal lake of fire in which the wicked are to be burned; or that I am to be condemned for Adam's sin; or that a few are arbitrarily chosen to be saved, and that all the rest of mankind are foreordained to be lost. If one must subscribe to such doctrines as these in order to be a Christian, then I must be counted out."

In this case there is the two-fold error:—first, in assuming that becoming a Christian hinges upon acceptance of a creed. For such an opinion there is not the slightest warrant in the Scripture. Second, in assuming that the objectionable dogmas referred to are actually to be found in any existing creed. The first error arises from an entire misconception as to the conditions of salvation, while the second is not only a perversion of the truth, but is a caricature of creeds. Creeds have their use in the realm of religious belief, as platforms of principles have their place in the political world. Some creeds are more antiquated than others, some are so defective as justly to be open to criticism, but a credal test in the matter of personal salvation, as in the case indicated, is something entirely foreign to the teachings of Christ and his apostles.

Equally erroneous is the idea that in order to become

a Christian, or to enter upon the Christian life intelligently, one must understand all about the Bible, accept all its teachings, and be able to explain all the difficulties which it contains. When the question of personal duty is pressed, frequently the answer is, "Yes, I know I ought to be a Christian, but there are many things in the Scriptures which I do not understand and can not believe, such as the sun's standing still on Gibeon, or that the earth and the heavens were made in a single week. Were it not for such statements as these, I might become a Christian."

But what authority is there for any such assumption as this?—for assumption it is. The Bible itself teaches nothing of the sort, and those who are stumbling over such embarrassments as these are laboring under serious misapprehension. It is not to be denied that there are things in the Bible which are difficult to understand, yet to such as are open-minded, most of these difficulties can be explained in a sufficiently satisfactory way.

But the question before us is not in regard to the Bible, nor to the things in it which are not easy to understand. The question is as to the conditions of salvation. These conditions are clearly set forth. This distinction is never to be lost sight of, that to become a Christian is one thing, to understand everything in the Bible is another and a very different thing. To do the first is a simple and plain duty; to do the latter will occupy a lifetime. By the terms of salvation, it is plain that one may be a Christian, and an intelligent Christian, without being able to solve all the difficulties connected with the explanation of the Bible.

Another misconception is that membership in the visible church is one of the conditions of discipleship, as if the Master had said, "Join the church, and thou shalt be saved." But what Protestant presumes to set up such a condition of salvation as this? Where is anything of the kind presented or implied in the Word of God?

The importance of church-membership is not to be denied. The reasons for joining the church after one has become a Christian are sufficiently numerous and strong virtually to settle the question in any candid mind. But the question as to what one must do to be saved, or to enter into right relations with God, is a very different question from that of church-membership, and the answer to it is given over and over again, and in the most unmistakable terms, in the Word of God. It is to believe on and to come into union with Jesus Christ.

Still again, the idea is prevalent with many people, that, in order to be an acceptable Christian, one must first of all attain to a certain standard of goodness. "I am not good enough," is one of the very common reasons urged against becoming a Christian. This is a great and serious misapprehension. Nowhere in the Bible is such a condition of salvation set forth. The question is not primarily as to how good or how bad one is, but whether one is willing to turn from known sin and to become obedient to God and to duty. All are alike sinners before Him with whom we have to do, all alike need forgiveness; and precisely as much encouragement is held out that the most degraded sinner will be pardoned and saved, if he repents, as that the sinner will be saved who moves in the most respectable society and who has never fallen so low. The way is open, through Christ, to all alike, and upon the same terms. It is to forsake sin with full purpose of the heart, and to turn to Jesus Christ in obedience and love. The moment one does this in sincerity, whether he be uncultured and besotted, or refined and a member of the most select circle, he is an accepted Christian. The moral or goodness test of acceptance with God is not found in the Bible.

The truth is, these various misconceptions respecting the condition of salvation or of acceptance with God, have somehow found lodgment in many minds, and are doing incalculable mischief. By reason of them, many

are hindered from entering the kingdom. The condition of salvation is not that one must perfectly understand, or even believe every statement of Scripture, although the Bible itself, properly interpreted, is trustworthy; it is not to accept some specific creed or any creed at all; it is not to attain to a certain standard of goodness or morality, although, if one be soundly converted, morality and goodness will follow; it is not to join the visible church, although to one who is truly a Christian that is the natural step to take, and the step which he will probably want to take; it is not to go forward to a mourners' bench, or to rise for prayers, or to speak in meeting, although these may be helps in coming to a decision; it is not to hold to some particular theory or view of the ordinances—the nature of the Lord's Supper, or the particular mode of baptism. No man has any right to set up any tests which are not divinely authorized, as none of these which have been indicated are.

The condition of salvation, as laid down by Christ over and over again, and in various forms of expression, is very simple, and it is extremely important to disentangle it from the false tests which are so prevalent, and which are sometimes clung to with such persistence. The simple condition is repentance and faith; a sincere purpose, with divine help, to abandon every known sin, and to be loyal and obedient toward Jesus Christ. Instead of saying, "Believe in the Bible and thou shalt be saved," or, "Accept a creed," or "Join the church," or "Attain to a certain standard of goodness," the New Testament says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." Other considerations have their place, but faith alone is the condition of salvation. This is fundamental. When one fulfils this condition, he is a Christian, whether he understands the Bible fully, or only partially; whether he is able to formulate his beliefs, or holds them vaguely; whether his character is firmly established, or is gradually growing stronger and purer. The moment one turns to Christ in

the spirit of confidence and love, that moment one is accepted, that moment one begins the Christian life, that moment he becomes an heir of salvation. Could anything be simpler or plainer? Is there anything mysterious about it? Is there anything really to cause one to hesitate, except his own unwillingness to give up sin?

Were one to begin the Christian life to-day, the first thing would be to yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to decide to begin a life of obedience to God and duty; the next to shape his course accordingly. He should take up the first duty which presents itself, no matter what it is, and do it faithfully as unto the Lord. He should then take up the next duty, then the next, and so on, discharging each one with the same fidelity as if Christ himself had personally laid the responsibility upon him. The first duty might be to settle a personal difficulty with a neighbor, or to forgive an offending one. It might be to get one's lessons better at school, lessons which have been neglected. It might be to give up an evil companionship, or to break off a bad habit, or to take up one's dusty Bible and read it, or to begin to pray, or to visit some one in need, to be more faithful to one's employer, or more upright and conscientious in one's business transactions. Whatever is clearly presented to one's mind as duty, whether from one's providential relations in life, or as it is suggested by the Spirit, or through reading the divine Word—whatever is shown to be duty, that one is now to do, and to do it in the spirit of love, as unto the Lord. We are to seek to live up to our honest convictions of right, constantly seeking more light and God's help, and to continue in this way through life.

Were one to follow out the suggestions above given, he would enter upon the Christian life, would live it from day to day, and, continuing to do so, would find it a sweet and satisfactory life. Conscience would no longer disturb; God would no longer condemn. Christ would be

recognized as one's Saviour, one's friend, one's Lord. All one's hopes would center on him. The past, with its short-comings and sins, would be forgiven; the present, with its self-denials, which, prompted by love, would no longer be self-denials, would be full of satisfaction; the future would be radiant with glory. All is very simple. Need any one who really desires to enter upon the Christian life hesitate for a moment? If one does delay, if he puts it off, pleads this reason or that, is it not primarily because he is unwilling to obey the command of his Lord?

The main difficulty is always with the will. That is the one thing which must be surrendered, and it is the one thing which people are the least willing to surrender. This is the one obstacle which overtops all others. It is not that one does not understand enough; not that one has not enough conviction, or enough feeling; there is really nothing in the way but a stubborn will. With a willing spirit, the whole matter would at once be settled. The Christian life would already be begun. The fundamental and vital thing is to be willing. Then Christ comes to the soul. Then there is forgiveness, and that instant one becomes a child of God, an heir of heaven. One may not have a full and realizing sense of all the blessedness of the Christian life, a clear consciousness of it at the outset, but this will come in time, increasing day by day. Why then should any one who is not a Christian delay? Why not begin now?

A writer has gathered together a number of Scripture answers to objections which are often urged for delay in becoming a Christian:

Is it because you are afraid of ridicule? "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed" (Luke 9: 26).

Is it because of the inconsistencies of professing Christians? "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14: 12).

Are you not willing to give up all to Christ? "What doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8: 36).

Are you afraid you will not be accepted? "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6: 37).

Is it for fear you are too great a sinner? "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1: 7).

Is it because you fear you will not hold out? "He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1: 6).

Are you thinking that you will do as well as you can, and that God ought to be satisfied with that? "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all" (James 2: 10).

Is it because you are postponing the matter without any definite reason? "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov. 27: 1).

The invitation is pressing. "Now is the acceptable time." "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Come, for "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Come, "for the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Come, for "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Come, for "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely."

## V

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The number and variety of misconceptions which prevail among the unconverted as to what it is and what it means to enter upon the Christian life are a constant surprise. The existence of these misconceptions is a serious hindrance to many who sincerely desire to become followers of Christ. To many it is exceedingly difficult to make it clear that instead of being the complicated and distressful experience which is imagined, entrance upon the Christian life is in reality a very simple and easy thing.

But not simply with reference to *beginning* the Christian life do misconceptions prevail. They prevail as to what this life is, what it is to live it day after day, what is the true Biblical conception of it, what its pervading spirit should be. Erroneous views, based upon half-truths, are not uncommon. Disproportionate emphasis is often laid upon some one aspect of the Christian life. In consequence, the development of Christian life and character frequently becomes so abnormal and unsymmetrical that the Christian religion is misrepresented before the world, and many who otherwise might be led to embrace it, reject it.

One of these misconceptions, and the first which we will notice, may be termed the passive misconception. The Christian life is looked upon as a state or condition of mind, the possession of which relieves one of all further responsibility. To "experience religion" and join the church are all that is required. Ever after one folds the hands and patiently awaits entrance into the

heavenly city, where, in the midst of dazzling glories, one is to be the passive recipient of blessings unnumbered, and "sing oneself away to everlasting bliss."

Such a conception of the Christian life, even though not definitely formulated, is a delusion and a snare. In it religion ends where in reality it only begins. By reason of this misconception, many drift back into worldly, self-seeking ways, until only by consulting church records is there any evidence that they have ever seriously considered the question of personal religion.

In reality, conversion is the beginning of the new life. It marks the first step in the formation of a righteous, Christlike character and in positive and aggressive service for the Master. The "right-about-face" from delight in evil to the choice of good, is but the commencement of the journey which is to be made. Many a battle is still to be fought before the victory over selfishness and sin will be fully gained. Every one ought to see that true religion means something more than a sentiment; that it is something definite, positive, practical in its nature; that it is a vocation, and that only as he lives in active sympathy with Christ, breathes his Spirit, walks in his footsteps, is he warranted in believing that his hopes of salvation are well grounded.

Then, there is what may be termed the negative conception of the Christian life. To enter upon it, one must guard against the doing of many things. He is constantly confronted with an array of "shalt nots." "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not bear false witness." The virtues which he contemplates are all of negative character, and grow out of simply refraining from doing wrong, from resisting evil, from opposing error, from fighting iniquity in its various forms.

Certainly, this is an important part of Christian obligation, but is by no means the whole of it. We are enjoined not only to "cease to do evil," but also to "learn to do

well;" not merely to resist evil and falsehood, but to develop the good and the true; not simply to destroy the works of the devil, but to promote positive righteousness and truth in the world.

This negative view is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is based upon a half-truth, and not the better half either. To fight evil directly, making that one's main aim, although this may sometimes be necessary, is by no means the surest way of conquering it. The most effective way, in dealing with Canada thistles, is to occupy the ground which they cumber with something which springs from a good seed. In the very process of cultivating the soil, so as to secure a harvest, the thistles are gradually uprooted and destroyed. Thistles of evil and error are most effectively removed in the same way.

There is also the ascetic view of Christianity. If this is not as common as it once was, it still exists. Personal holiness is to be cultivated, not while remaining in the world, but by withdrawing from it. God is to be honored and served, not by active ministrations among men, but by devoting oneself to meditation and prayer, to the study of the Scriptures, and to holy exercises. This to many is the ideal holy life. Thus, we often hear people saying that, if they could only change their circumstances, get away from their temptations and besetments, and give undivided attention to the cultivation of their Christian life, they would certainly make spiritual attainments which for them are now impossible. This is the view of the monks, which led them to hide in deserts and mountains, to occupy cells and monasteries, to fast, to expose themselves to cold and storm, thinking that by so doing they were offering acceptable service and sacrifice to the Lord. As a matter of fact, they were only wasting in idleness and useless self-torture the gifts which God had bestowed upon them.

Such a conception of the Christian life as this is

abnormal, unwholesome, unscriptural. The verdict of history is against it. True, we are commanded to be separate from the world, but the separation is to be inward, in spirit and purpose. No change in outward circumstances can regenerate the soul or cleanse it from sin. Strength of character and spiritual growth are secured by the conflicts of life. The oak on the prairie, exposed to winds and storms, is hardy and tough. The oak deep in the forest is relatively weak. While we are still to be in the world, we are not to be of it.

Furthermore, the world, with all its weakness, suffering and sorrow, needs our help. We are commanded to minister to the needs of our fellow men. To withdraw from society, and spend all one's time and energy in seeking to save one's own soul, is not only disobedience to God, it is downright selfishness and cowardice. While we are enjoined to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, we are also to visit the widow and the fatherless in their affliction.

We may next notice what may be termed the emotional conception of Christian living. Here the state of the feelings is the all-important consideration. The emotions and the feelings are made the test of religious condition. If one is consciously happy, all is well; if not, the Lord has withdrawn his gracious influences. If one would understand his religious condition at any time, would know whether one is growing in grace or backsliding, there must an examination of the feelings. These are made a spiritual barometer. Such a course is not wiser than that of the boy who plants seeds in his garden and then goes out every day and digs them up to see if they have sprouted.

The emotional view of the Christian life is a very superficial one for us to take. The feelings are largely involuntary. They come and go. They are dependent upon a variety of influences, not always under our control. The weather, the condition of the nerves, the state of the

stomach or liver, or the natural temperament, very largely determine their nature. The vital question is not how one happens to feel at a given time, but what is the supreme, all-controlling purpose in life. Is it to serve and obey God, or is it to live for self and the world? If the former, and the daily life harmonizes with this purpose, then one is a Christian, even if there are interruptions in one's spiritual happiness or joy.

While riding in the cars in Switzerland, I fell in with a gentleman from this country, who tried to entertain me by reading aloud from his diary, which stated that on Monday he did not feel very well; Tuesday, felt some better; Wednesday, very miserable; Thursday, slightly improved; Friday, down again, very bad; Saturday forenoon, quite well—afternoon, wretched. I wondered whether this man had no higher aim in keeping a diary while traveling abroad than merely to record the fluctuations of his feelings. If only he had turned his thoughts away from himself, and had become interested in the grand and glorious scenery, not only would his dreadful morbidness have been relieved, his health would have been improved. Certainly, he would have been a more agreeable companion.

If introspective, emotional Christians would dwell less upon their feelings, cease viewing them as a barometer of spiritual attainment, occupy their minds with the great ends of Christian living, become absorbed in Christ's work, their spiritual health would be better, they would grow in grace more rapidly, and would be far more winsome as companions along the dusty way we are compelled to travel.

Then, there is the legal view of the Christian life. It is a round of duties, hard and disagreeable, a life of strict conscientiousness, of literal and exact obedience to the commandments. Such conscientious devotion to duty is not to be lightly esteemed. It should be encouraged. It is refreshing, when so many are lacking in this respect,

to meet with people who are thoroughly devoted to conscience and to principle. Over-conscientiousness should be tenderly criticized.

But the Christian religion is something more than a life of duty in the hard, literal sense of that word. The heart and life are dominated by love, so that the performance of duty becomes easy and delightful. Love animates us in everything. Yet duty as a motive is not to be disparaged, although it is not the highest motive. We may look upon it as a balance-wheel to keep the machinery in motion when other and higher motives fail us. But no Christian should be satisfied to live simply under the impulse of duty. He should strive to rise from this lower plane of mere obligation to that of love; from bondage to the letter to the liberty of the spirit. These legal Christians are still in the Old Testament, under law, when they might be in the New Testament, under grace, where there is liberty, where the yoke of Christ is easy, and where his burden is light.

Related to the views above mentioned, and growing out of them, there is the gloomy view. There are those who convey the impression to others that the Christian religion is solemn, joyless, unattractive. From their general bearing, one would infer that they regard it as wicked to smile, a sin to be cheerful or buoyant and hopeful. They seem constantly to be afraid of too much levity, frown upon and check all the natural, overflowing spirits of youth. They seem to take a morbidly serious view of everything. In this they misrepresent the Christian religion, and to such an extent that those who have not accepted Christ, instead of being attracted to him, are repelled and kept out of the kingdom.

Various causes may lead to this conception of Christianity—a naturally somber temperament, serious and prolonged trials, the habit of looking at everything from a legal point of view; or it may spring from an unhealthy physical condition, from unstrung nerves, from bad diges-

tion, or from other ailments, in which case one's first duty is to try to get well. With restoration to physical health, one's spiritual skies brighten. But whatever the cause, this gloomy view is not the true and Scriptural view. In its very nature, the Christian religion is joyous, joy-producing, promotive of a cheerful, hopeful spirit.

A college student was influenced to become a Christian very largely by the fact that his associate, who was an earnest and active believer, was also always hearty and cheery in his manner, full of fun and frolic. The unconverted student had been brought up to take a gloomy view of the Christian religion, and had been repelled by it, but the daily life of his friend, showing him that there was no inconsistency between Christian earnestness and a buoyant cheerfulness, set him to thinking, and finally led him to his Saviour. We must not forget that we are to "serve the Lord with gladness."

The views which I have mentioned are samples of misconceptions which prevail in regard to the nature of the Christian religion and Christian life. While not entirely erroneous, they are sufficiently so to be misleading, and are frequently exceedingly harmful in their effects. There is some truth in each of them, but partial views are sometimes as mischievous as positive errors.

What, then, is the Biblical conception of the Christian life? What is the true nature and the real extent of Christian service?

First of all, there must be the decision, or choice, or purpose to live for God, for his cause, for the right, instead of living for the world and for self. God's will is to be supreme. A new and all-comprehensive principle or spirit is to dominate the entire life. That principle or spirit is love, in the large, broad, Christian sense; a loyal devotion to God, with righteousness and good will toward our fellow men, and even toward those who despitefully use us.

To live the Christian life, after one has entered upon it in good faith, is to carry this new spirit and purpose into everything one does. It is to be lovingly loyal to God. It is to do everything as unto him. It is to try to do just right by one's fellow men in all relations. It is to do others good as there is opportunity, and to want to do them good all the time. Duty is to be performed in this spirit of Christian love, and with the same conscientious fidelity as if the Lord himself had personally assigned it, and it were being done in his presence and under his eye. Thus the entire range of the Christian life and its varied responsibilities are to be regulated by the precept, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

This being the case, the usual conception of the nature and extent of acceptable Christian service, or of what serving the Lord is, does not include enough; its scope needs to be greatly enlarged. Many erroneous impressions prevail in regard to it. If one is serving the Lord when engaged in specifically religious work, may he not serve him with equal intensity, and with equal certainty of the divine approval, in his business or in the discharge of professional or social duties? May not fidelity here be counted as Christian service, or must it be set aside as something purely secular?

A man toils day after day, week after week, in shop or office or store or farm or in a factory. On one evening of the week he goes to prayer-meeting. In this he feels that he is serving the Lord. Is he not serving him also in work which has occupied him all the rest of the week? Has only the prayer-meeting hour been devoted to Christian service? A woman visits a sick neighbor, carries delicacies to her, talks with her encouragingly, reads to her helpful Scripture passages, kneels in prayer at her bedside, and rejoices that she is able to do that much at any rate for the Lord, and that he accepts her service. But she does not dare to think that her

burdensome household duties at home are of a similar sacred character, or that in caring for her children, sewing and mending for them, toiling in the kitchen, she is also rendering acceptable service to the Lord. In the true conception of Christian service, all this should be included. If a man is faithful in doing his duty in his secular toil, carrying the Christian spirit and Christian conscientiousness into it, he is rendering service to the Lord as truly as when he goes to the prayer-meeting. The Lord certainly accepts as readily the faithful labors of the mother in her home duties, if they are performed in the Christian spirit, as when she ministers at the bedside of a sick neighbor.

The importance of distinctly religious service cannot be overestimated. The obligation to engage in it is urgent and pressing, and in the adjustment of our varied responsibilities as large a place should be assigned to it as possible. But what is here emphasized is that this is not the only Christian service. Even the most secular work, so termed, if done "as unto the Lord," is as truly Christian service as the other. Thus the distinction which is often made between our work and the Lord's work, between secular duties and religious obligations, is incorrect. Everything is to be done to the glory of God, and when so done, it is acceptable Christian service.

But it is not to be forgotten, rather it is to be emphasized that, to constitute acceptable Christian service, all this so-called secular work is to be performed conscientiously and well. In the Lord's service there is no place for shams or deceits. Sometimes this practical phase of the subject is not sufficiently appreciated. Those who would never think of uttering a false or profane word, or of committing a dishonorable act, or of violating any of the ten commandments, will sometimes perform their regular work carelessly, slightly, imperfectly. Yet in reality it is just as sinful as to be profane or dishonest, knowingly to neglect an employer's interests; or for a

tailor to sew up a seam so that it will give way at the first strain; for a shoemaker to put on a patch which will not hold; for one to put inferior material or bad workmanship into a watch, or a house, or a man-of-war, or to use light weights, or a short yardstick, or to adulterate food, or to defraud in any other way. Wherein is there any difference?

An ancient sculptor who wrought with marvelous pains, even at the back part of a figure, was once asked why he carved the tresses of the statue's head so gracefully. "The statue will stand high up in its niche, with its back to the wall, and no one will see it." "Ah, but the gods will see it," was the sublime answer. So must we do all parts of our work with similar conscientious fidelity, if we would render acceptable service to the Lord.

We see thus how practical a thing the Christian life is, and how radical and thoroughgoing a change is involved in becoming a Christian. It means a right attitude toward both God and our fellow men. The great, all-embracing principle of Christian love, with its two elements of righteousness and good will, is to rule the heart and control the entire life, while all that one does is to be done to God's glory.

One or two practical thoughts are suggested in conclusion:—

1. This larger conception of the nature and extent of Christian service helps to throw light upon various practical questions of life and duty. If every part of a truly consecrated life is to be regarded as Christian service, then a Christian is not warranted in engaging in anything into which this spirit of consecration cannot be carried, or upon which God's blessing cannot be sought. If this would tend to cut off, as inconsistent, some things which we may have been accustomed to do, it will also exalt some other things which are not usually thought of as belonging to Christian service. If we need recreation, that recreation, if of a proper sort, becomes acceptable

Christian service, as truly so as regular toil, or religious work, and it is to be entered upon in that belief. If this is true, then it is our privilege to feel that in the use of a wheel for needed physical exercise, or in taking a summer's outing for the rest and recreation which are essential to the highest efficiency in God's service, we are pleasing him as truly as when engaged in the performance of regular Christian duties.

So in regard to the use of money. We are wont to think that whatever is devoted to the support of the church, or to charity, or in sending missionaries to the heathen, is so much contributed to the Lord. It is. But so is all other money which is spent in meeting necessary and proper expenses of whatever character, as in the support of one's family, in providing and beautifying a home, in educating children, in paying just taxes. We are to regard our money as having been entrusted to us by the Lord, and we are to employ it in such ways, and in such ways only, as we think he will approve. Doing this, we may feel assured of his blessing, even in connection with our secular expenses, as truly as in giving for distinctively religious ends. It is a wise plan to set apart a definite portion of one's income for the latter purpose. It may be a tenth, or more, or less, as the Lord has prospered; but it should not be forgotten that we are stewards, and that all we have is to be consecrated to the Lord, and that in spending any money, as we are called to do, for other than direct religious uses, we are also spending it for him.

The same is true of culture and the use made of it. Each new accession of knowledge, each enriching experience, each so-called gift, natural or acquired, whether of music or oratory, of literary or business ability, of fine looks or winsome ways, is to be utilized, not to promote personal or selfish ends alone, but as well for the benefit of others. These gifts were bestowed for high ends, and are to be consecrated to the Lord's service.

Thus neither the man of wealth, position, or power, nor the person of culture or ability in any direction, nor the young woman of beautiful appearance or charming ways, nor the young man of exceptional talents, has any right to devote such gifts to purposes of self-gratification alone, or to further a mere worldly ambition. It is a great responsibility to be entrusted with such gifts or powers, and strict account of the use made of them will be required. Yet one may well feel grateful for them, since larger Christian usefulness is thereby rendered possible. Thus in the Scriptural conception of the Christian life and service, not only is everything we do to be done as unto the Lord, but everything we have,—time, talents, money, is to be consecrated to his service, and to be employed for his glory.

2. This Biblical view of life is inspiring and ennobling. Everything pertaining to life in this world is thus exalted; every part of it is made sacred; the commonest duties are transfigured; even the work of a drudge may be divine. Nothing is trivial or indifferent. Prompted by love for Christ, all toil is rendered holy. Thus Christian service is not the privilege or the pleasure of a few rare hours. It embraces the whole range of life, and includes all its relationships—to home, to friends, to business, to society, to pleasure, to humanity. Yes, to humanity, so that the young man, who, in connection with the recent war, felt constrained to enlist, that he might go to the relief of the suffering, the outraged, and the starving reconcentrados, if he carried into that stern duty the spirit of the Master, was rendering acceptable Christian service.

Still further, what an encouragement, and a rebuke as well, is involved in this view of the Christian life and service, for all who are chafing in the midst of their providential allotments in life, who are lamenting their narrow sphere, and their inability to do much, if indeed anything, as it appears to them, for the cause of Christ!

Cheer up, brother, sister. If in the path of duty, you are rendering Christian service all the time. God asks you to be faithful where you are, and to meet each duty, as it comes to you, whatever it may be, as discharging it unto him. Humble as the work may be, it may be Christianized by breathing into it the spirit of love and consecration. If called to wait—and there are times when one can do nothing else—we are to wait as unto the Lord; and if suffering be our portion, then we are to suffer with patient resignation as unto him. Sometimes we can do most for Christ in this way. We serve Christ by doing each moment the duty of that moment, and in this way live acceptably before him every day and every hour.

## VI

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO SANCTIFICATION OR PERFECTION

As we have seen, it is a misconception to conceive of the nature and scope of the Christian life as consisting simply in a state of heart or a condition of mind which accompanies conversion. It is equally a misconception to overlook the responsibility to acquire holiness of character after conversion. Nor is the conception less erroneous which would make sanctification or holiness the only aim of the Christian life. The acquisition of holiness may be sought for selfish ends. The supreme thought may be centered upon self-culture, rare spiritual experience, holy character, and the whole world of duty to others overlooked or made secondary. As another has said: "While character has great preciousness, heaven is not to be a mutual admiration society, where the redeemed will exhibit their graces of character to each other as prize-fighters might show their thews and muscles."

The responsibility of building up God's kingdom in the world has been committed to his believing children. To promote this end, rather than their own personal sanctification merely, should be their supreme aim. In this, all believers are to be coworkers with God. The importance of seeking to grow in holiness can hardly be exaggerated. This is to be secured in service for God and humanity, rather than by being made a special end in itself. "None of us liveth to himself," not even in the matter of spiritual culture. One is under obligations to minister to the spiritual welfare of others. It is only necessary to refer to the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians, and the twelfth chapter of Romans, to show how

strong a hold the idea of service had upon one of the leaders of the early Church. But while a Christian is not to be occupied solely with thoughts of his personal attainment, the importance of spiritual growth merits special attention.

That we may attain to sanctification, or to perfection in holiness in this life, is, as we conceive it, a misconception. The difficulty with such a view is, that while perfection may be theoretically possible, both Scripture and the facts of practical life do not warrant it. Properly interpreted, Scripture gives no countenance whatever to such a view. If some Bible characters are called perfect, the word is used relatively, not absolutely. It indicates their piety rather than sinlessness. The Bible records many sins of so-called perfect men. Absolute perfection pertains to no one but God. James affirms that "in many things we all stumble" (Jas. 3:2), while Paul declares himself not to have attained or to be already perfect, but only to be pressing toward the goal, "unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14). John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Hence the claim that one has not sinned for a certain number of days, or weeks, or years, is preposterous. The holiest Christians bewail their sins, and are conscious of having fallen far below the perfect standard.

The difficulty really lies in the definition of sanctification or perfection. Probably what those persons mean who claim that they are in a sanctified state is that they are wholly consecrated to God. They confuse the thought of consecration with that of sanctification. The former ought to be in the possession of every child of God. The doctrine of sanctification or of perfection, as ordinarily held, is exceedingly mischievous. It tends to introduce a spirit of caste into the religious life. It concentrates one's interest upon an exalted spiritual experience, a frame of mind, or a state of feeling, which is supposed to

accompany sanctification, rather than upon a purpose of constant obedience to God and of unwearied service in advancing his kingdom. The former often leads to an unwholesome, if not to a morbid spirit of introspection; the latter is characteristic of a true Christian life. The doctrine of perfectionism tends also to bring the Christian religion into disrepute, since to announce oneself as having reached a state of sanctification is but to invite the world to a more minute scrutiny of one's life and motives than human nature, even at its best, is able to endure.

To be actually perfect is to be as Christ was. Of whom in this life can this be said? One may be entirely consecrated—and much of so-called perfection never rises higher than this—may ever be pressing toward the mark, but it is presumption to think of having attained. There is no indication that the apostles ever thought of such a thing. If the standard of perfection be lowered, if sin be made a less serious thing than it is, perfection may then be attainable, not otherwise. In reality, sanctification is the work of a lifetime. It begins with the beginning of spiritual life in the soul, and ends, if it ever ends, in heaven. There is certainly no place this side of that blessed abode where one can say that sanctification is complete. The holier one becomes, the freer is he from spiritual conceit, the less inclined to boast of his spiritual accomplishments.

Another misconception, and one which is closely connected with that which we have just considered, is related to a so-called second conversion, after which one's feet are supposed to be planted on a rock from which they can never slip. The struggle is now over, the work is finally completed, and all that remains is to walk on the highway of perfect holiness with the celestial city ever in view.

Those who anticipate any such deliverance, once for all, from further struggle with temptation and sin, are quite certain to be disappointed. There is no Scriptural warrant for asserting that through any single act of faith, or

as the result of any special spiritual experience, a supply of grace may be obtained which will keep one from further sin. Christian people are exhorted evermore to be upon the watch against temptation, and are encouraged by the assurance that as their day their strength will be. The power of sin may never be entirely broken, but, when the time of testing comes, the grace of God will be sufficient for all who will avail themselves of it. Paul was once caught up into the third heaven, but this was by no means the end of his conflicts. There were fightings without and fears within still. So it has always been in Christian experience, and so it is always likely to be.

Nor is there any Scriptural ground for the idea of a definite experience like a second new birth spiritually, any more than there is for a second physical birth. With the growing Christian there may be, often are, successive experiences—tidal waves of inflowing grace, which mark advancements in spiritual progress. These experiences may be due to new light gained, or to a spiritual quickening, or to victories achieved over besetting temptations, but there is no propriety in calling any of them, however marked, a new conversion. They by no means imply that the work of sanctification is complete, or that one will never falter or fall again. Each of these experiences is a step forward and upward in the heavenly way. They may be more pronounced or more frequent in the case of some persons than of others. But while it is the privilege of all Christians to seek renewed and enlarged supplies of grace, richer manifestations of God's love and presence, and fresh baptisms of the Spirit, the summits of Christian experience are not reached at a bound, nor can one remain constantly upon a mount of transfiguration. Progress is made only by patient continuance in well-doing. Nor should it be forgotten that while conversion is instantaneous—though one may not be able to point to the exact moment of it—sanctification is the work of a lifetime.

Still another misconception is that the circumstances in which one is placed may be unfavorable to this higher growth, even if they do not render it impossible. Many imagine that they could live far more satisfactorily as Christians, and grow in grace more rapidly, were their circumstances different; were they in some other business; were they freed from household burdens and from social obligations, or could they start entirely anew somewhere else.

It is possible that Christian living would be easier and more successful were conditions changed, but it is by no means certain. New circumstances would bring new difficulties, new temptations, new trials. The fact remains that we are where we are in the providence of God. If we are to be Christians and make progress in the Christian life, we must be contented to live and grow and develop where God puts us. Here we must gain our victories and suffer our defeats. The fact that others may be in more agreeable circumstances makes no difference, in so far as we and our obligations are concerned. Here are our circumstances, and here our responsibility to live the Christian life and to grow in it must be met.

Yet we may take courage from the fact that Providence has not placed us where we are without a wise purpose. It may be that our needs in the way of discipline can be better met in the place we occupy, and by means of such experiences as are incident to our lot, than in any other circumstances. At any rate, we are required to grow where we are. Here we are to make as much progress as possible. In this the grace of God will assist. The truth is, many of our difficulties are of our own making. Their source is within rather than in external conditions. We cannot escape from ourselves merely by changing our circumstances or our location.

These and similar misconceptions will more fully disappear as we consider next, more particularly, the positive teaching of Scripture upon the subject of sanctification and growth.

If anything is plain in the teachings of the Bible, it is the recognition of the principle of growth, as applied to the Christian life and character. Growth is everywhere manifest in the natural world. Seeds are planted, spring up, grow—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Animals grow, men grow from infancy to maturity. By proper training the physical powers are made to develop in strength, and the physical nature to improve in the quality of its fiber. In the same way the intellectual nature unfolds and develops. It is to this end that schools are established.

Similarly, the highest part of our being, the moral and spiritual, may also be made to develop in strength, in beauty and in Christlikeness, and this is the part of our nature with which Scripture has mainly to do. It is the spiritual part of man which the gospel primarily seeks to transform. When the spiritual part of our being is renewed, the whole man is benefited. To the spiritual nature Christ addressed the mightiest motives. This he would beautify through the unfolding of the Christian graces. And when the Christian is exhorted to advance and to grow, it is taken for granted that the progress intended is along moral and spiritual lines. Thus Christ's higher nature unfolded as he grew up at Nazareth. Not only did he grow in physical stature, but through the development of his spiritual nature. He grew in favor with God and men. Later he exhorted his disciples to be perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect, implying growth or progress toward this high standard. Peter exhorts to "grow in the grace"—or in an appropriation of grace, by which to develop in this higher sense—"and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"—not in intellectual knowledge alone, but in practical and experimental knowledge as well. Nothing would be more conducive to spiritual growth than just such spiritual knowledge as this. Paul was possessed by a consuming passion to advance in this direction. He was ever

trying to rise above his old natural self, ever seeking to be made over inwardly by the grace of God, ever pressing toward the mark of a Christlike character and spirit. In Hebrews, the exhortation is not to linger at the beginning, or at the rudiments of the divine life and knowledge,—the a, b, c's of experience,—but to press on toward perfection, Christ being the Great Exemplar, his character the standard to be reached (Heb. 6:1). Thus the Christian is expected to go forward in this heavenly way, until he attains in some degree to “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

The Biblical conception of the Christian life is thus seen to be one of growth. Beginning with conversion, or entrance upon the new life, it is intended that growth should continue as long as this earthly life continues.

What is the measure of this growth? What is involved in it, and how is it to be promoted?

Growth in character or in holiness, or, as theologians term it, sanctification, has for its end a restoration of the image of God in Jesus Christ in those who believe. This is far from being their condition at the beginning of the new life. In yielding the will to God, the chief citadel has been surrendered, but the country is not yet subdued. There remains much land to be possessed. There has been a right-about-face from a wrong course to a right one, but the journey in the new direction is yet to be accomplished. The new choice to live for God, making the interests of his kingdom one's chief end and aim, needs to be confirmed and strengthened. The old, corrupt nature, with its perverted sensibilities and its mighty propensities to evil, needs to be transformed. Self is to be overcome, temper is to be trained, pride is to be brought down, impatience is to be curbed, evil habits are to be uprooted, right habits are to be formed. The will needs to be entirely and permanently subdued, the motives to be purged and purified, the Christian graces to be developed, every thought to be brought into captivity to Christ.

Thus we see how vast a work must be done within before the sanctifying process can be completed. There is room for expansion, growth, enlargement, on every side of our nature. There is not a faculty of our being which is not capable of immeasurable development. No one has advanced so far as to be beyond the need of this, and God never makes a man entirely holy at once by a miracle of grace. People who talk about being wholly sanctified can really have but little conception concerning the nature of sanctification.

Furthermore, this progressive transformation or growth involves conflict. There are obstacles within to be overcome, there are temptations without to be resisted. We are naturally selfish, and the new life, with its unselfish spirit, antagonizes the old life just here. It is at this point that the warfare, of which all are conscious, is mainly waged. It is a struggle between self-will, self-gratification, on the one hand, and obedience to God's will, to right and to duty, on the other. The central principle of the new life is that of loving obedience to God. But the whole tendency of the nature is against this, and until the old, selfish man within is subdued, there will be constant resistance and constant antagonism. Paul, who knew by experience what it was to wage this warfare, recognized and referred to this. It was all to be summed up in battling with self, with the flesh, with the old man. The whirlpool within, seeking to draw everything into itself for self-gratification, was to be transformed into a fountain of life, giving out for the refreshment of others. Nor is there any place in this life where one can lay his armor down in the assurance that the struggle is over, or that his last foe is conquered. Even after all that is possible has been done, one will still be conscious that he falls far below the model or standard which is given us in Christ.

All this work of overcoming worldly tendencies, and of enlargement and building up in the primitive graces

of Christian character, is comprehended in the process of sanctification, or growth in Christlikeness of character and temper. From the nature of the case, the process must be gradual. Conversion is the beginning, the initial point of the new life. Sanctification is the process carried forward. At conversion one stands at the entrance of a long way which remains to be traversed. He is at the foot of a mountain whose summit he is to seek to gain. The conquered country of the believer's heart is to be restored to harmony and order, but this, like our government's work in restoring order and the blessings of true liberty in Cuba and in the Philippines, after years of confusion and anarchy, must necessarily require time.

Yet this lifelong process of transformation or growth, this progressive sanctification, is not carried forward by man's unaided strength. Mere force of will would be entirely inadequate. The power to do this is supplied by God himself, and this power or grace is to be appropriated by means of faith. God works within, "both to will and to work, for his good pleasure," but man works out his own salvation. Thus, the two-fold agency of God and man is involved. God seeks by his grace to transform; the believer cooperates. Before conversion, the Spirit is represented as outside the heart, knocking for admission. In sanctification, the Spirit is within, seeking to cleanse and renew. This heavenly grace is supplied as needed, as manna was supplied to the children of Israel in the wilderness. The supply is renewed each day, and is to be appropriated and applied each day.

But while this sanctifying process proceeds by faith, constantly appropriating and applying the grace of God, it is brought about or promoted largely in connection with the use of means. Hence, we speak of "means of grace." They are helps to spiritual progress. There are, first, the usual agencies, such as prayer, reading and studying God's Word, worship, a knowledge of the truth, Christian fellowship, obedience, active Christian service, and all

the quickening and inspiration which come from regularly engaging in the worship of the house of God.

There are, in addition, indirect or negative helps. There is the discipline of Providence in connection with the experience of suffering and trial, and the various ordeals through which we are called to pass. Received aright, these trials do not fail to work out the peaceable fruits of righteousness in character and life. Still further, many things which are usually overlooked, or regarded as hindrances, may be utilized in the disciplinary process, if one will. All the difficult and trying experiences of daily life may be turned into stepping-stones to something higher and better. This is true of the dull, prosaic routine of life, the drudgery, so called. Endured patiently, as unto the Lord, it may be of great value. Sometimes we are compelled to associate with disagreeable people. Even these may be made a means of grace to us. While the influence of some of the people with whom we associate may be spiritually uplifting, the influence of others, who are uncongenial, disagreeable, and who are difficult to get along with, may become a means of grace to us. Socrates said that he married his wife, Xantippe, a woman of uncertain temper, for the sake of the discipline he might gather from the relationship. Probably not all are so eager for this higher growth as to enter deliberately upon a lifelong discipline of this character. Yet, if one's married life is unfortunate, Socrates is a good example to follow. This experience may prove to be a means of gaining a full and complete conquest of one's own spirit. It may make him a saint. It would at least seem to be a good school in which to cultivate the grace of patience.

One may be pressed by temptations threatening his overthrow, yet he is made stronger by every victory gained in resisting them. Disappointments and failures cause embarrassment and distress often, but these also may be utilized in the training of temper. The many

and varied burdens of life may serve to call into exercise all the graces which we possess, but the very exercise of these graces will tend to develop and strengthen them, just as exercise day by day in a gymnasium strengthens and develops the physical powers. The truth is, if one is intent upon spiritual advancement, he may discover means of promoting it on every hand, often in the most unexpected quarters. Sources of spiritual nourishment abound everywhere, if we but choose to recognize and to utilize them.

This sanctifying process is completed only when the sinner is restored to the image of God as manifested in Christ. As this is impossible, in view of man's corrupt nature, under present circumstances, it follows that complete sanctification is not secured in this life. One may continually advance toward it, but Christ is the only being who realized it while on earth. One may be entirely consecrated, even if imperfectly sanctified.

We see, therefore, what the Scripture doctrine of sanctification is and involves. Sanctification is not something which is attained at a bound. It is a lifelong process under the direction of the indwelling Spirit, with whom we are to cooperate. It is not to be sought as the whole end and aim of life, but rather in connection with a life of consecration and service. It is a mistake to suppose that we cannot live the Christian life and grow in it in the circumstances in life in which Providence has placed us. It is possible to realize spiritual discipline from the most adverse conditions, to gather spiritual nourishment from the most trying experiences, just as the bee extracts honey from every opening flower. Just as the mariner hoists the sail to catch the breeze from every quarter to waft him on his voyage, the Christian may make use of everything which comes into his experience to promote his spiritual progress.

The one thing needed to kindle the desire, to awaken the aspiration, and constantly to promote the work of

sanctification within the heart, is the presence in ever-increasing measure of the Holy Spirit. If we follow his suggestions, we shall advance in the Christian life, grow in grace, approach nearer and nearer the likeness of Christ, in temper, in character, until at length, when we see him as he is, not before, we shall be like him.

## VII

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE VALUE OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE IN TESTING THE REALITY OF DIVINE GRACE

Some people seem to regard the Christian religion as a mere sentiment, and the grace of God as a delusion. They seem to have no conception of the gospel as a reality, or that it is an actually transforming spiritual force in human life, or that there are verities of spiritual experience which are as capable of proof as are the so-called facts of the material world. Yet these facts were brought to light by Paul nearly two thousand years ago, and testimonies as to their genuineness have been given in every generation since.

Others lay stress upon the intellectual side of the gospel, upon mere belief in or intellectual acceptance of certain formulated truth. But this alone does not take hold of the heart and conscience, and has little effect upon life and character. The devils, even, believe and shudder.

To not a few the gospel seems to be something whose chief design is to prepare men for the hereafter. Little stress is laid upon its relations to the present life. In reality, the stress is reversed. The function of the gospel, first of all, is to save men from the power of sin, to transform character, and to bring comfort and cheer into the life that now is. When this result is effected, there need be no apprehension for the future. The gospel was intended to prepare men to live, not to die; or, rather, to prepare them to die by preparing them to live.

What is the testimony of experience on these points?—

for such questions as these are to be settled, not by argument or speculation, but by practical experience. What has the gospel actually done for those who have received it? What results has it accomplished? Has it been a moral force, an uplifting agency, a means of comfort and consolation to those who open their lives to its power? What, for example, were some of the facts which Paul discovered through his experience concerning the nature and power of the gospel of Christ?

1. First of all, as to the means by which we overcome sin, Paul became convinced by his experience that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation for every one that believeth; that it is able so to renew or to make men over at the very foundations of character, motive, spirit, as literally to render them new creatures; that its acceptance lifts a heavy load of condemnation from their souls, and by its exhaustless spiritual resources secures a progressive victory over the power of sin during the earthly life. Prior to the apostle's time the problem had been to find some effective antidote for human sin. No philosophy had been able to solve it. Various remedies had been devised, but every trial of them had resulted in failure. Paul discovered the saving power of the gospel through his own experience of it, and the conviction that here was the one God-given remedy for human sin so grew upon him that it became the consuming passion of his life to make this momentous discovery known throughout the world. This conviction, indeed, and this desire, became the mighty impelling force of his marvelous career. With him the gospel of Jesus Christ was literally the power of God unto salvation. What nothing else had ever done it could do. It could effect transformation at the very core of one's being, impart a new motive, a new spirit, an entirely new aim in life. It could give victory over evil habits, however deeply rooted; its resources of help and strength were exhaustless, and were available to

all who, by faith, were willing to appropriate them.

To-day these truths are very familiar. Men have heard them from their earliest years. But from the very fact of this familiarity with them, the ears of many seem to have become dulled to their tremendous significance. Recognition of them has become feeble, and their personal application rare. Thus the greatest force in all the world for rescuing enslaved men, for breaking the fetters of appetite and passion and habits of sin, and gradually bringing men into the likeness of Christ—this spiritual force—if not largely ignored, is certainly not appreciated, even by Christian people, as it ought to be. Even to-day, how many devices of purely human origin are constantly proposed as a remedy for sin, or for particular sins:—pledges, social agencies, education, legislation, reformatory measures, better environment, and a score of other things, which, while they may be useful in their place, are but weak and superficial substitutes for the one divine and effective remedy for the great disease of human sin. Not one of them goes to the root of the difficulty, yet the only infallible specific which is able to effect a radical and permanent cure seems hardly to be thought of.

The grace of God is just as powerful in itself and in its quiet workings to-day as ever it was; just as efficacious now for revolutionizing the aims and lives and dispositions of men as it was in the case of Paul or of any of the marked instances of transformation and renewal which the ages since have developed. Men may have lost sight of this fact, but the gospel itself has never lost its power.

It was through the agency of the gospel that Augustine, who in his early life was a notorious libertine, was entirely revolutionized in his character, and afterward became the brightest luminary of the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries. By the same means John Bunyan, who grew up in the indulgence of the grossest

vices, lying, stealing, profanity, drunkenness, was converted. Then these old things passed entirely away, and gave place to the new things in Jesus Christ. He afterwards wrote "Pilgrim's Progress," by which his name was immortalized. Gough, the prince of temperance lecturers on two continents, was a confirmed inebriate until he was lifted out of the depths of sin and kept by the grace of God. It is noticeable that all these men themselves attribute the mighty revolutionizing results which were wrought in their lives to the grace of God as made known in the gospel of his son, Jesus Christ.

Counterparts of these instances are by no means lacking in more recent times. Illustrative examples, just as striking, are brought to light every day. Those who have visited the old Jerry McAuley and kindred missions in New York City, or the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, will not soon forget the simple testimonies to the power of the gospel to save, to which they there listened. Men who had been low, degraded, besotted slaves to appetite or passion, some for years, acknowledged that but for the saving power of the grace of God they would have been lost beyond redemption. We hear one say that he was a drunkard for twenty-seven years, had lost position after position, had reached a point where it was anything to get rum. It was only as the gospel reached him that he was rescued from his dreadful thralldom. Nothing else had any permanent effect upon him to this end.

A gray-haired man reports that for the best part of his life he has been a servant of Satan. Now he is a servant of Christ. "I was," he says, "most unlovable, mean, low, had lost all self-respect, was capable of anything, but Christ came and lifted me up. Now I am his servant. I owe everything to him." Another, "I was in darkness, despair, no money, no hopes, drifting down to a drunkard's grave and a drunkard's hell—a mere walking appetite, caring only for the next drink.

Now I am free, made so by the gospel power. I keep my eye fixed upon Christ and I am secure." In many of these cases, what temperance-societies, or prohibition laws, or moral suasion, or education, or will-power, or social influences, or all combined, had failed to do, the gospel of Christ accomplished. These different agencies are not to be disparaged; there is need of them; but the gospel alone is able to save. Only in Christ is there perfect and abiding security.

Some at these meetings bore testimony to their release from the opium-habit, which had long held them as helpless bondmen; from impurity, by which they had been dragged down to the depths; from thieving propensities, inherited perhaps, which had grown upon them with the years, and which had frequently sent them to prison; from profanity and foulness of tongue, which had become a second nature; and so on through the whole catalogue of enthralling habits of evil. Occasionally one may have fallen back, from letting go his hold upon Christ, but multitudes had been saved from these evils, and their altered lives ever after bore testimony to the reality of the mighty change which had been wrought in them by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

These are but samples of testimonies of a similar character which are given every day in these gospel missions, and of the same clear, positive sort. They are profoundly impressive, and as one reflects upon the feeble faith of many professing Christians, their reluctance to bring this sure remedy to the attention of sinful men, and to press it upon them with all earnestness, their hesitancy fully to utilize it for the correction and overthrow of evil habits and proclivities in their own lives, one is led to ask, Are we only playing with the gospel? Do we really believe in it as a saving power from sin? Does it mean anything to us beyond being a supposed passport to glory? Is it recognized as of any real value for present needs, present victories, present cleansing, and

present quickening in righteousness and truth? Is it, or is it not, the tremendous reality which it is represented to be in the Word of God, which it was to Paul, and which he risked everything to proclaim to lost and dying men?

The truth is, one of the urgent needs of the times is that this fact which was brought out in the apostle's experience, and which seemed such a marvelous discovery to him—that the gospel is actually the power of God for human salvation—be emphasized and applied afresh. Then we may hope for more adequate results than are at present realized. For while many believe all this theoretically, the number of those who believe it with deep and mighty conviction seems to be relatively very small.

2. Another fact or truth of the spiritual realm which was wrought out and demonstrated for all time in the experience of the apostle, was the sustaining power of the grace of God in every form of trial which human nature is called to endure. No matter how trying the ordeal was in his case, whether bitter disappointment in cherished plans and hopes, or terrible physical pain from stripes and stonings and attacks from infuriated mobs, or from intense anxieties and heavy burdens growing out of his care of all the churches, or from persecutions inspired by a most malignant hate, he bears his testimony that through all he was sustained by the grace of God and by an ever-present sense of his nearness and love. He was cheered and comforted and enabled to rise above and to gain the victory over all his untoward surroundings.

As a matter of fact, from the very moment he surrendered his earthly prospects and entered upon the service of Christ, he was beset with difficulty and hardship and danger. Here are his own words: "In labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten

with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of rivers, in perils of robbers, in perils from my countrymen, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in labour and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

Yet, in spite of all these experiences, which would ordinarily blanch man's cheek and fill his soul with fear, he was able by the grace of God to say, "I have learned . . . to be content;" "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me;" "When I am weak, then am I strong;" "And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee;" "Our light affliction, which is for the moment." Thus was he strengthened and comforted by the grace of God, as manifest in the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ. This is most remarkable testimony. He had made a discovery of most marvelous and far-reaching import, a discovery which had intimate and vital relation to the most serious experiences of life. In the interest of burdened and sorrowing humanity, he felt constrained to make this discovery known as glad tidings for all men.

This fact of the sustaining power of the grace of God has often been verified. Many in every age have confirmed it. But if we would appreciate the pioneer service which the apostle rendered to the world, we need to remember that he had not, as we have to-day, a long record of Christian testimony to turn to for his encouragement, or to stimulate his confidence; he had to break ground, as it were, had to test this proffered grace virtually at first hand, had to make his way, cut a pathway through a thick and tangled forest of every imaginable difficulty and trial like Stanley, pressing his way through

the dense and almost limitless forest in the interior of the Dark Continent. He had to learn these lessons for himself, and the testimony he bears as to their value is a legacy for all generations.

There is need of a fresh emphasis upon this same fact or possibility of Christian experience to-day. Many Christian people fail to realize their high privileges in this direction, while multitudes of others seem never to have heard that relief and comfort, adequate to support one in the deepest trials, have ever been provided. This is a world of unrest, trial and sorrow, and this notwithstanding the many bright and pleasant things which we are permitted to enjoy. No one is free from trouble. The existence of sorrow is a fact of human experience. Each heart knoweth its own bitterness, and the saddest thing of all is that so large a proportion, even of Christian people, seem to be sorrowing as those without hope. Has the discovery of the apostle, announced so long ago, been forgotten? Has the remedy for human woe, so fully tested in his experience, become obsolete? Has the grace of God in any measure lost its effectiveness and power? Or is the difficulty with those who do not or will not believe, or fully believe, or open their hearts to receive?

A noble testimony as to the power of the gospel was given by a clergyman at his examination preliminary to his installation as pastor of a church to which he had been called. He told the story of his life, of his mental struggles, of physical perils upon a score of battlefields, of perplexities and anxieties in a hundred forms since, of having been called to stand by the bedside of the dying, and to administer comfort to the living, and then, finally, of how, within a few consecutive weeks, he had been called to part with one, two, three of his own dear children, victims of malignant disease. Yet through all these ordeals, many of the severest kind, he had found the gospel of Christ to be everything which it had been represented to be in the divine Word. It had never

failed him. This is a modern confirmation—one of multitudes of instances—of that which was so fully wrought out in the experience of Paul. Many professed Christians may know all this theoretically, but they fail to apply it, or fully to apply it, in their own condition. So they remain in the valleys, when they might be upon the heights, are in the shadow when they might be in the light, go groping about in the dark when the way might be luminous before them, cast down when they might be exalted, weeping when they might rejoice, in bonds when they might be free, in spiritual poverty when they might be rich. Paul's discovery has shown the world a more excellent way.

3. A third great lesson or truth, which was demonstrated in Paul's experience, is the reality of another world and the certainty for believers of an abundant and blessed entrance into it at length. The assurance of this proved in his case to be both a mighty inspiration for faithful Christian service in this life, and to calmness and an assured confidence for the final hour.

Christ had brought "life and incorruption to light through the gospel"—i. e., had revealed them, thrown light upon them. That which was dim and unreal before, which had long been guessed at and speculated over in vain, was now made plain. It was no longer vague and uncertain. Another world was a reality. Christ came out from it, experienced a constant and vivid sense of it, bore testimony in regard to it after his resurrection, and there, we are told, he ever lives even to this day. Furthermore, he had declared that where he was his disciples were to be also, to dwell with him forever. And so real was all this to the apostle, and so united was he to Christ in sympathy, faith and personal devotion, that his thoughts were ever reaching upward to this heavenly abode where Christ was. Everything, indeed, in his aspiration, gathered about his now glorified Lord. Sometimes he

was so exalted in spirit that he hardly knew whether he was in the body or out of it. He heard unutterable things; he had visions of indescribable glories. And so real were they to him, and so blessed, that he even longed to depart and be with his Lord, something from which we, notwithstanding all the joy which we have been taught to associate with such an event, are wont to shrink. Thus spiritual and eternal things were very real to Paul, were the only real and enduring things, in fact. All else was but temporary and transitory, and was of value only as it was related to that which was to come.

The sense which the apostle had of the reality of the world to come was a constant and mighty inspiration to aggressive Christian service. The time was short; the work to be done was great. Multitudes were perishing in their sins. He felt that necessity was laid upon him to do all in his power for their rescue. "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." In the discharge of this duty he was buoyed up as by a great hope, a confident expectation of the future, and he looked forward to the time of his departure with keen anticipation. It was with perfect calmness that he awaited the final summons, not to a peaceful end, but to a violent death. "For I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 6-8).

What was true in Paul's case has been true in thousands, tens of thousands of instances since. Men have been enabled to face death calmly through the grace of God and a sense of the reality of the realm to which they confidently looked forward. Without a murmur on their part, they have been cast to wild beasts which were waiting to devour them; they have gone to the

stake singing as they went; they have been tormented, tortured, suffered all manner of cruel persecutions, have gone unmoved to violent deaths, upheld by the sustaining power of the grace of God which Paul had found so real in his experience, and by which they were made confident of the glorious realities to come.

What a power such a sense of the reality of the world to come would be in our lives! Sometimes, in our more favored moments, we seem to catch a glimpse of the glory to be revealed, but for the most part this glory is imperceptible. Mists from the earth obscure it. Clouds intervene to obstruct it. Yet Paul speaks with all confidence of the world to come, of life in it, of the glory and blessedness of that life, and urges those to whom he writes to strengthen their faith by constant thought of it and by anticipation of the joy which they shall have when they enter into it. What we need to do is to fix the eye of faith unalterably upon Christ, and to dwell upon the certainties which the apostle discovered in that world whither Christ had gone and of which he has written, so that our sense of it may become more vivid. We may not rise to a full realization of it at once; we may gain only momentary glimpses of that which is to be, during our earthly pilgrimage; still, we shall be conscious of blessed influences coming into our lives from that realm of the blessed, and we shall be sustained by an ever-deepening conviction of these invisible and eternal realities, till at length, when we are called to go hence, it may be that such an experience will be permitted us as often comes to the departing Christian. Thus it was with one who was well known in the ministry in the State wherein he had for a long time resided. Just before he breathed his last he seemed to rally for a few moments from his unconsciousness, and lifting his eyes upward with intensest interest depicted on his countenance, and reaching out his hand as if to grasp something, he exclaimed, "Oh, the angels! Oh, the angels!" and then expired.

The nature of such an experience we can not know, but we do know that many have had it or something akin to it, as if they were catching their first glimpse of the glories of the eternal world, and of the divine messengers who had come to guide them on their way to it.

These spiritual realities and these fore-glimpses of the hereafter, which from time to time are granted to God's trusting ones, should mightily confirm our faith, impart new dignity to the present life, and make it glorious with the light which constantly streams upon us from above and which transfuses all that is common and painful into beauty and joy. Thus we may have an assured confidence that when we at last come to pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death, we shall ourselves fear no evil, for his rod and his staff will comfort us.

These, then, are some of the realities of this realm of faith which were wrought out in the experience of Paul and placed upon record for all time. He was a bold adventurer in an untried sphere. Even now, after all that we know of the past and of its spiritual triumphs, it seems a courageous thing for any one to venture literally upon the declarations and promises of God, actually to rest in them, and we look upon him who does so as a man of marvelous faith. But Paul struck out into territory until his time mainly untraversed, with but limited data to guide him, and boldly pushed his way through darkness and doubt to the results which he reached, and which, out of a profound conviction of their worth, he proclaimed with unprecedented earnestness and power. His gospel was a mighty spiritual power of God unto salvation. It destroyed the power of sin. Its resources proved to be abundantly adequate to sustain him in the severest distress and suffering through which he was called to pass; it made the other world real to him and imparted a glorious hope in regard to it; it afforded a constant and powerful incentive to press onward through the multiplied and increasing ills of this present life in

carrying out his all-mastering purpose to preach this gospel throughout the world; it gave him a sense of strength which no trial could weaken, and a calm assurance that when he drew near to his final hour his Lord would be with him. These were facts of his own experience. They were discoveries which he himself had made. They were tremendous realities in the life of his own soul, and such was the strength of his conviction in regard to their importance that he was constrained to devote his life to a world-wide proclamation of them.

A pressing need to-day is a new emphasis upon these verities of the gospel. Men are hungering for gospel truth. They may not be able to define or to formulate their own sense of this need, but the need exists, and Christ's gospel is the divine response to all these cravings of the soul. The gospel has not lost its power. Its resources are not diminished. The difficulty is that there is so little belief in the spiritual facts. It was unbelief which prevented Christ from doing mighty works in many places when he was on earth, and it is the practical unbelief of the friends of Christ to-day which is blocking the progress of the Kingdom. Too often gospel verities are kept in the background in the preaching of the times, or are set forth only in a faint and timid undertone. With a new emphasis upon them, not only would the faith of believers be toned up, and many people now indifferent be led to receive the truth; it would do much to counteract and correct the tendency, now so manifest in many quarters, even with not a few Christian people, to seek satisfaction in the various religious substitutes which from time to time arise in different forms and under different names, such as Christian Science, Spiritualism, Ethical Culture, Theosophy and kindred follies. Dissatisfied with what is presented them as the gospel and the truths of revelation, they seek satisfaction from other sources. A reassertion of these spiritual verities to which reference has been made, and which

Paul wrought out in his experience, could not fail to make plain, by contrast, the worthlessness of all substitutes for the gospel, and the complete satisfaction which is to be found in the grace of God as made known in Jesus Christ.

## VIII

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THINGS SPECIALLY NEEDED IN CHRISTIAN LIFE AND CHARACTER IN THESE TIMES

In their main features Christian life and character are always and everywhere essentially the same, yet with wide diversities of expression. Each life has its excellences and deficiencies, each character its peculiarities and its needs. The same is true of communities as compared with each other, and of different countries lying adjacent, even of different periods or epochs of time. Each community, each country, each epoch of time, differs in the type of Christian manhood or womanhood which it produces, has distinctive characteristics of its own, points of strength or weakness peculiar to itself. Hence, in order to reach the most perfect exemplification of the Christian life and spirit at any time or anywhere, certain prevailing tendencies must be repressed, certain deficiencies be supplemented, certain qualities receive a special and renewed emphasis. The one inspiring, in-working gospel remains unchanged, but the new exigencies which constantly arise demand new adaptations and fresh adjustments of it.

These facts suggest the practical inquiry as to what aspects of Christian life and character need special emphasis now, or should be made to stand out in more than usually bold relief in the age in which we live. We ask these questions in view of certain misconceptions as to the nature and obligations of Christianity which are widely prevalent in Christian society.

The first of these misconceptions relates to the import-

ance of clearly apprehending the grounds of confidence in Christ and his salvation. Many Christian people fail to appreciate the value of an intelligent faith, or the vital relation which it sustains to Christian life and character. As a consequence, they make no effort to enlarge their knowledge of the facts upon which Christianity rests; to increase their information in regard to its nature and the results it has produced. Since their convictions are not well established, since their faith is feeble, since their characters are weak and unformed, they fall a ready prey to temptations which easily destroy their last faint hope in Christ.

A second misconception relates to the true basis of Christian character. That basis is righteousness. Yet many Christian people do not recognize this; they lay little stress upon conscience as the voice of God in the soul. The fact is strangely overlooked that the primary aim of the Christian religion is to effect a moral transformation in life and character. Consequently, while there are shining examples everywhere of thoroughgoing piety and of genuine Christian conscientiousness, it is a sad fact that far too much of the religious life of the times is of a superficial type, springing out of a soil which has no moral depth.

A third misconception has to do with spirituality of life. There is a failure to perceive any particular distinction between the character and spirit of the true Christian, on the one hand, and the character and spirit of a good moral man who makes no pretension whatever to a godly life, on the other. The ordinary, natural virtues, all of which are good as far as they go, are accounted sufficient. There is little thought of anything higher than these, no aspiration after true holiness, no purpose to develop the graces of the Spirit. Many people do not think it necessary that there should be a clear line of demarcation between the lives of professing Christians and the lives of people of the world. Religion is largely

negative, is devoid of vitality, is without aggressiveness, has no spiritual power, exerts little influence upon character, has little relation to life.

In order to remove these misconceptions of the true spirit and scope of the Christian life, and to answer pressing inquiries as to what aspects of Christian life and character need special emphasis, it may be said :

1. There is need of a more intelligent faith. Faith is essentially love or trust. Its object is a person. That person is Jesus Christ. The spirit of loyal devotion, of loving obedience to him, constitutes the very essence of the Christian religion, the substance of Christian obligation. In proportion, therefore, as one really knows whom he has believed, not only from a practical experience of his saving grace, but through an intelligent apprehension of his character, his requirements, and the reason of our confidence in him, will one's devotion be likely to be most faithful, one's obedience most conscientious and complete, the committal of one's soul's interests to his keeping the most sweet and restful. Let one become convinced, as one may be, of the solid basis there is for confidence in the historic facts on which the superstructure of the Christian faith is reared; let one realize how perfectly it is adapted to the profoundest needs of human nature, and how wondrous are the moral transformations which are always effected by it whenever it is allowed free scope; let one become familiar with its history, its triumphant progress, its marvelous achievements in every sphere; let one's faith in Christ and the gospel of his love become really intelligent, established in rational conviction, grounded, in fact, in every department of one's nature; life and character will then be constantly brought under the influence of the loftiest incentives, under the transforming power of Christ's own example and spirit, and the principles of righteousness become more and more incorporated into the very fiber of one's being. At the same time, any danger of being swayed from his con-

fidence by a passing breeze of strange doctrine, or of being easily turned from the faith, like the foolish Galatians, by some other gospel which is not a gospel, would be diminished in corresponding degree. It is more of this kind of faith, intelligent, rational, strong, able to give a satisfactory account of itself to one's own soul, or to others, which is one of the urgent needs of the times.

Not all faith is of this intelligent character. Many believe for no other reason than that their fathers believed before them; or because some one else believes and has advised them to believe also, and to join a church which happens to be popular; or they have been led, under some special pressure or impulse, to yield assent to current religious beliefs, but without thought or investigation of their own personal need. In such circumstances, when at length a mental awakening comes, if ever it does come, and one is led to inquire into the grounds of his traditional beliefs, he is liable to fall into confusion and embarrassment. Unable to give a satisfactory reason to his own mind for the hopes he cherishes, a person may conclude that none can be given, and so either yield to despair, or assume that all is a delusion and abandon the Christian faith altogether. That is, when the rains descend and the floods come, as sooner or later they will, in the form of mighty attacks of skepticism and unbelief, the foundations, which have been built upon the sand, are undermined, the superstructure which has been reared upon it is utterly destroyed.

To accept Christ upon trust, intellectually as well as spiritually, may be right and proper in childhood, or in early youth, but it should hardly be regarded as sufficient for thoughtful years or mature experience, especially in an age when everything seems to be tested by the standards of human reason. And yet, too many Christian people are content to remain all their lives long just where they were in childhood, on the threshold of the new life. They never get beyond the most rudimentary things;

their faith becomes no more intelligent with the years; they are no better able to give a reason for their hope; their characters are no more staunch and steadfast; their anticipations no more bright and confident, than when they first believed.

President Finney tells the story of an old professor of religion, who, on his dying bed, began to be anxious concerning the future. All the evidence he possessed that he was a Christian, and the foundation of his hope, was in the form of a statement of his experience which had been written at the time of his supposed conversion. This had been filed away for safe keeping, along with other important papers. In his distress, the man called for it, that he might reread it, and thereby renew his confidence and reinforce his courage. What was his dismay when he was told that the mice had been among his papers and made sad havoc with them all, and had destroyed this all-important document with the rest! The man had trusted this written statement for the foundation of his faith. In his sorest need it failed him utterly. Where now was his hope? And yet the ground of many a professing Christian man's confidence to-day is hardly more intelligent or substantial than this.

It is only as the head has been informed after the heart has been touched and moved, only as the certainty of the underlying facts of Christianity becomes firmly established in the convictions, that the Christian faith can be said to be robust, vigorous, reliable, safe. Not only does such a faith constitute an immovable foundation for righteous character, it renders its possessor secure against the poisonous influence of a subtle skeptical malaria which seems to pervade the very air we breathe, proof against ill-judged and unwarranted criticisms upon the sacred Word, guarded against the bold, unscriptural speculations which are now often urged and propagated with a persistency and zeal worthy of the actual truth as it is in Christ, im-

pervious against the assaults of the infidelity of the times, so rampant and defiant. Only such a faith as this, rational, strong, clear, can hope to exert or long to maintain a controlling influence over the intelligence and culture which are but the legitimate outgrowth of our history and institutions. Fortunately, the Christian religion furnishes in itself abundant reasons for a faith like this. Its resources, never yet fully developed, much less exhausted, are equal to the most exacting demands which may be made upon it. It shrinks from nothing, invites, rather, the most thorough and searching examination. It allies itself with the highest intelligence, has reason, truth, conscience, a mighty history on its side. In such circumstances, with everything in its favor, it will be through no fault of its own if ever it suffers loss in its encounter with its foes. If it ever fails to exert the influence or to make the progress which it ought, it will be because its resources have not been sufficiently appreciated, its character and potency as intelligently apprehended as they might be, by its would-be champions or its leaders in aggressive effort.

A Russian officer once said to an Englishman, referring to the Crimean war: "It was worth all it cost to us of defeat and loss, because it taught us the great lesson, learned from the English, of the superior value of an intelligent soldiery." Those men in our Civil War who best appreciated the character of their country, its history, its institutions, its liberties, the transcendent interests involved in its preservation, whose faith in it and the righteousness of its cause was most truly intelligent, were its bravest defenders, the most prompt in duty, the most valiant in conflict. So, the more intelligent one's faith in Jesus Christ and his cause, in his gospel and his word of truth, the more likely one is, other things being equal, to be immovably established in Christian character and conviction, and the more zealously to strive for the speedy triumph of that kingdom of whose ultimate success he is unalterably persuaded.

2. In order to meet the misconception that arises from thinking that the Christian religion has little to do with character, with righteousness, or with moral obligation, emphasis should be placed on the fact that a great need of the times in which we live is more conscience, a greatly quickened moral sense among Christian people, a more loyal devotion to convictions of right and duty, character and conduct more scrupulously squared by the standards of the Word and the life and example of Jesus Christ.

There are indications of a marked decline, if not decay, of the conscientious spirit in the present, as compared with former times. To say that one bears the Christian name and is a member in good standing in a Christian church is by no means always synonymous with saying that he is the very soul of integrity and honor, that the obligations of conscience and duty are more keenly felt than before, or than in the case of many who are leading godless lives. There is too much reason for the suspicion, sometimes expressed, of a divorce between religion and righteousness, between the Christian profession and conscience.

This comparatively low moral tone is variously manifested. It appears in social life, responsibility for the character and standard of which rests very largely upon its Christian elements; in the feeble protest made against reprehensible vices; in the readiness with which moral lapses—among men, of course—are condoned, provided only the offenders be of sufficiently high social standing; in the absence of a nice and sensitive regard for the truth, apparent in complimentary falsehoods and polite lying; while it is getting to be so common as to be expected almost as a matter of course that one's religion will be largely left behind if one removes from the East to the West, or passes a vacation at some fashionable resort.

It is seen in business life in the constant disposition to overreach or in some way to take selfish advantage whenever possible; in the ignoring often by Christian em-

ployers and employed alike of the Golden Rule in their relations to each other; in the incurring of obligations which it is morally certain can never be met; in the failures which leave one, or one's wife, in comparative affluence, with no thought for the just claims of needy creditors; in astonishing defalcations, getting to be sadly frequent even among men of high standing in the church.

It is manifested in the demagoguery of political life; in the questionable practices pursued to secure preferment, even by Christian men; in the elevation of those utterly unworthy, men of unsavory reputation even, to be the standard-bearers of great political parties.

It appears in the Christian Church, in the lax discipline which so often prevails; in its loose business methods, especially in neglecting promptly to meet financial obligations, regardless of the inconvenience and even suffering thereby occasioned; in the failure of its members to pay pew-rents or meet subscriptions when due; in indifference to the claims of Christian benevolence which are properly brought to its notice, especially in its niggardly contributions for the cause of missions, both home and foreign; in its undue deference to the wealthy, and in a corresponding neglect of the poor; in its unconcern in view of the alarming growth of Sabbath desecration in this country, to say nothing of carelessness in regard to one's own example; in a culpable apathy in regard to public reform movements, particularly the temperance cause, which is not excused by the mere fact that judgments differ as to the practical methods of carrying them on.

This same lack of conscience is sometimes apparent even in the pulpit, in disregarding high principle and in truckling to popular whims and worldly ways in the interest of personal popularity; in yielding to clamorous demands for salvation-made-easy preaching, regardless of the truth as it is in Christ and set forth in his Word; in refraining from faithful proclamation of the whole

truth for mere prudential considerations; and when one, having confessedly departed from the standards of the church or denomination with which he has been identified, insists on retaining his place and standing at the expense of infinite mischief and disturbance, rather than quietly and honorably withdrawing and joining the denomination with which he has come to be in hearty sympathy.

These are some of the many ways in which, in different spheres and relations in life, this lack of a thorough conscientiousness on the part of many Christian people is made unmistakably apparent. They are but the outward signs of moral deterioration within. Christian principle is subordinated to worldly policy. Conscience, if not slumbering or suppressed, is certainly not keyed to high Christian standards. It is flexible, easily adjustable, as in the case of the celebrated English statesman, who, on being asked how he had contrived to hold office, both under the governments of Queen Mary the Papist and Queen Elizabeth the Protestant—two sovereigns and two policies unlike even to the point of bitter antagonism—pointedly replied, “By always imitating the willow instead of the oak.” There are too many descendants of the facile Englishman in Christian ranks. Their consciences are like the easily bending willow, rather than the sturdy, unyielding oak.

The results of all this are most disastrous to the cause of Christ. It is one of the most conspicuous obstacles to the progress of the kingdom. Christian character is demoralized. The Christian profession is at a discount. The Christian religion is misrepresented and yet is held responsible. The Christian Church is a less mighty power for righteousness among men than it ought to be and might be. Judging of the reality of the religious life and the sincerity of the Christian profession by the daily lives of the professors, as they have the right to do, worldly-minded people lose confidence in it, become more and more indifferent to it, are often altogether

alienated from it. Manifestly, one of the great needs of the times, even among Christian people, is more conscience, a thorough-going conscientiousness pervading the whole being, dominating the life, manifesting itself in all relations—not the hard, angular conscientiousness which is so forbidding and repulsive, but that tender and sensitive conscientiousness, suffused with love, so beautifully exemplified in the life of Christ, in the case of Paul, and of which in more recent times the life of Abraham Lincoln affords a conspicuous illustration.

If this great and fundamental need of the times is ever to be met, the place at which to commence is Jerusalem. Judgment must begin at the house of God. Christian people must elevate the standard and lead off in the reform. A revival of righteousness, a mighty rising tide of honesty, integrity, conscientiousness, within the Christian Church is one of the urgent needs of the times in which we live.

3. In order to meet the misconception which arises from regarding the Christian life as a matter of formality, or of outward respectability, emphasis should be laid on the fact that the need of every Christian, both for himself and for the church to which he belongs, is an increase of spiritual vitality. This vitality springs from a personal union with the personal Christ. This produces oneness of spirit with him. By a constant inflowing of the divine life, the soul is nourished and sustained, as the branch is nourished by its union with the vine. Christ's life is reproduced in us. Such a union as this brings fulness of joy and continual peace, transfigures duty, and is a constant inspiration to fidelity. It renders the soul responsive to the loftiest incentives to action, tends to awaken and sustain a holy enthusiasm in Christian service, causes a spirit of moral earnestness more and more to pervade the life.

We all know how far short of the standard of spiritual attainment Christian experience ordinarily falls, and

how many lapses there are from it, even if one has approximated to it. The religious life of many has no depth, springs from no profound conviction, yields little or no satisfaction, has in it neither vitality nor power. Its formal, external character is patent to all. A deacon had been reproving a neighbor for profanity, after which this neighbor remarked, "Now see here, deacon, what's the difference? You go over to prayer-meeting every week, get up and talk and pray, and once in a while I swear a little, and you know very well that neither of us means anything by it." The difficulty is that there is no throbbing, pulsing, spiritual life within, no reaching after higher things, no vital personal love for the personal Christ. As a consequence, worldliness makes easy inroads. The soul is in no sense fortified against the seductive influences about it. A spirit of indifference and unconcern is quite likely to take possession of it, if indeed a stroke of spiritual paralysis does not render its last condition far worse than the first. From the lack of that spiritual vitality which is invariably present when there is personal union of the disciple with his Lord, the Church is made to suffer greatly and the cause of Christ sadly to languish.

Notice now two practical results which would flow from more of this spiritual vitality in the hearts of Christian people:—

(1) In the first place, it would tend, in growing degree, to promote individual spiritual security. The power of temptation and sin over the soul would be correspondingly lessened. One would be lifted above the range of his ordinary besetments, as the inflowing tide lifts the stranded ship above rocks and shoals. All thought and interest would be centered on Christ and his service. There would be little room for anything else. The "expulsive power of a new affection," as Dr. Chalmers terms it, would be increasingly experienced. The soul's absorbing love, sweet and satisfying in itself, would

be its best, its strongest protection. So long as its truest life continued to be hid with Christ in God, there would be virtual security against anything calculated to bring spiritual harm.

This principle is constantly and variously illustrated. How often a man's love for wife and children operates as a shield against temptations which would otherwise overpower him! How many a young man has been held to a right course by a consuming interest in some worthy pursuit or aim! How often a new-found love for Christ, in the case of a converted drunkard, has held him as by an anchor from drifting back to old ways of sinful indulgence! How many Christian people to-day are kept from the insidious, devitalizing, paralyzing worldly influences about them by the very fact that, burning within their souls, there is this satisfying personal devotion and love to Jesus Christ! How quickly all the vexed questions concerning popular amusements would be solved were Christian hearts more aflame with this personal love! Absorption in the higher would constantly lessen the desire for the lower. Love would prompt willing sacrifice even of things in themselves harmless, rather than to be an occasion of moral disaster to another.

As a protection, then, from the power of temptation and sin; as a means of security against the seductions of "the world, the flesh, and the devil," now leading so many Christians astray, undermining their influence, destroying their usefulness, blasting their hopes, more of this personal heart-union with Christ is one of the imperative needs of the day. Without it, indeed, no Christian can really be said to be secure.

(2) But, secondly, more spiritual vitality would furnish the loftiest motives to Christian fidelity and to aggressive Christian effort. Love for Christ touches the very center of all life and action. As the Christian disciple comes into real oneness of desire and aim with his Lord, he more and more loves what he loves, hates

what he hates, and is moved to effort to promote every enterprise known to be dear to his heart; while the reactive influence of this process upon himself inevitably deepens and intensifies his entire nature. Mere butterfly conceptions of life, the listless, aimless habit of drifting along day by day, as if life had in it no other purpose than mere pleasure, give place to profound moral earnestness, to an anxious desire to spend one's energies in ministering in His name to the needs of mankind. It was this spiritual vitality which inspired and sustained Paul in his unwavering purpose, girded him for his mighty undertakings, nerved him to face undaunted the persistent opposition which everywhere confronted him, comforted and cheered him in all the fiery ordeals through which he was called to pass. Oh, the wondrous power of an all-consuming love like this!—this passionate devotion to the personal Christ, transforming the life, developing the nobler qualities, stimulating to heroic endeavor, awakening and nourishing the holiest enthusiasm.

Were Christian life and character in these times thus brought under the power of Christ' life and example, there would be far less occasion for the sneering comment of godless people, sometimes heard, as to the hollowness of the Christian profession, and the insincerity of those who make it. There would be less occasion to bemoan lifeless prayer-meetings, or for anxious discussion as to how to get a church to work, how to awaken interest in missions, how to increase benevolent contributions, how, in short, to stir up the people to any particular line of Christian effort. All such questions would settle themselves. Love would do the work. It would impel to a vital, practical, constant personal interest in every form of Christian service. The church would become a beehive of Christian activity, the public services would be occasions of fresh inspiration, the cause of Christ would prosper, the kingdom go on from triumph to triumph.

## IX

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT

Is it possible to learn the lesson which the apostle Paul declared that he had learned—in whatsoever circumstances he was placed, to be content? In noticing some of the misconceptions which prevail as to the real source of contentment, we will dwell first upon the fact of discontent, and then call attention to the remedy.

There is a sense in which discontent, or, more accurately, dissatisfaction, is both proper and right. Sometimes it is a hopeful sign, as when one is dissatisfied with his spiritual condition, and longs for a closer walk with God: It is never wrong to be dissatisfied with one's attainments intellectually, to hunger and strive for a larger knowledge, a broader mental outlook. It is proper, within due bounds, to seek to better one's condition in temporal things, and, in legitimate ways and with proper ends in view, to labor to increase one's possessions. It is right to be dissatisfied—one ought to be—with a wrong occupation in life, or with any wrong course, whatsoever, which one may be pursuing. There are many respects in which restlessness, dissatisfaction, discontent, are not only not censurable, but highly commendable. Indeed, when we think of the deeper nature, the spiritual, it is hardly possible, if this be at all alive, ever to rest satisfied with anything which this world affords.

But the discontent which we are now considering, and for which we are to seek a remedy, is of an entirely different character. It is that uneasy, restless state of mind which many cherish with reference to the providential circumstances in which they are placed, and which it

is beyond their power essentially to modify; a state of mind which tends to render both themselves and those around them miserable, and which dishonors God.

As a matter of fact, how few persons can really be said to be contented and happy! Other people may think them to be so, or that they ought to be so, but that does not alter the fact of their discontent. If only their circumstances were different from what they are, they imagine that they would be satisfied. If only they had the wings of a dove and could fly away from where they are, or back to where they once were, they would be at rest. If they could only get out of the particular business in which they are engaged, which is the most trying of any under the sun; or if they could only get into some other business, no matter what it might be; or if, instead of living so aimlessly, with time hanging heavily, all outgo, no income, they could get something to do; or if they could have means to dress as well as some of their acquaintances, and to have as nice things as they have; or if they were only rich, not so very rich, but well enough off to be comfortable; or if they could have as good opportunities socially, or educationally, as many of their friends; or if they could only secure some coveted position in public life, or get back to private life, or be released from responsibility and care; or if they only had a happy disposition, or could appear well, or were fine-looking, or were only relieved of some disfigurement, or were not so large and heavy in person, or were only of stouter build, or not so stout, or could live in a more congenial climate; or if they had only married differently, or had not married at all, or could only get married, or get unmarried, it is confidently believed that there would be perfect contentment of mind; ambition would be satisfied, present disquietude be banished, and happiness secured.

This is by no means a fanciful picture. Upon visiting a place of former sojourning, after long absence, visiting

friends of other days and inquiring of them individually as to their prosperity, I was so struck with the common undertone of their answers as to make a note of it. On stepping off the cars, the first person met was the driver of an express-wagon. He had held the position for years, was always bright and cheery, always faithful; it seemed as if he and his work were just suited to each other. No one would have suspected any discontent in his case.

"Well, Mike," said I, "how is it with you?"

"Oh," he replied, "everything goes on well enough, I suppose, but I often get blue. It's nothing but work and rush all the time, from morning till night. I wish I could get into something else, it makes little difference what. I can't feel contented to plod on in this way all my life. If I only had a berth like Mr. — I think I would be satisfied."

I called on a young man who was doing a prosperous business in a thriving Western city, now on a visit to the home of his boyhood. He had been unusually successful, had a fine home, a large income, everything that a young man with business aspirations could wish.

"How goes the world with you, James?"

"Pretty well," was the answer; "but sometimes it seems as if the cares and anxieties of my business would crush me. I am constantly haunted by a fear that something may happen to my family, or to myself, or that real estate, in which I have large investments, may go down, or that competition may ruin my business. Then what would become of us? I often think I'll get out of it all, buy me a farm, and settle down to a quiet, restful, contented life, which I cannot say is my condition now."

Next I met a friend who had a fine position in connection with an extensive manufacturing establishment, with light work and good pay. "Well," he said, "I suppose every man thinks his own lot in life the hardest, yet sometimes I think that mine is about the most discourag-

ing of all. I'm on a salary, can't get ahead, my wife is an invalid much of the time, and it costs about everything I can earn to get along. If I could only get into some paying business for myself, I should feel a great deal better, and far more contented."

I inquired about the proprietor himself, a man envied by many on account of his wealth, his beautiful home, his splendid turnouts, magnificent horses, which he took pride in driving. To those looking on from the outside, it seemed that he had everything that heart could wish, everything to make him contented and happy—no limit to his money, apparently, to his command over the good things of this life. "Oh," said my friend, "he is far from being a happy man. He is restless, uneasy, worried, most of the time. Whenever he is ill—and he has had several very serious attacks lately—he is afraid he is going to die. This fear seems constantly to rise before him, and of course to a man of his worldly ways of thought and life, there can be little to hope for beyond."

I next talked with a physician, of large practice, successful, perhaps the leading practitioner in town. I congratulated him upon his success. "Yes," he said, "that's true—success in one sense—but there's another side to it all. You don't know how troubled and annoyed I am all the time. One may do the best he can, and people are not satisfied. In times of sickness they lean upon me, seem willing to do anything, to pay anything, if I will only help them, or save a darling child. But as soon as the crisis is past and my services are no longer needed, they seem to forget all about it, and between you and me I have hard work to collect out of my large practice even enough to live. I am about sick of it. I wish I were out of the business and in something else."

Another friend was pinched with poverty. Life had seemed to go hard with him. Like all the others, he talked with the freedom of former days. Said he, "I

have never aspired to large things, but it is extremely difficult to make ends meet from year to year, to feed and clothe my large family. If I only had a home of my own, no rent to pay, a few hundred dollars ahead, I feel sure I should be reasonably happy." Another was tied to a farm, anxious to get away from it and move into town. Another wanted a farm and to get into the country, but his family were unwilling to make the change.

Then there were feminine trials. One woman had been obliged to leave her husband to escape his harsh treatment. Another was also ill-mated, and always obliged to go to social gatherings, or to entertainments, or to church, alone, while her husband went off downtown to a clubroom or elsewhere. Another was restless because life with her seemed to amount to so little,—simply a round of social duties, fashionable calls, parties, discussion of the latest styles, with no chance for reading, culture, growth in the higher nature. If she could only break away from her present surroundings, go elsewhere, start anew, she could then shape things to suit her better.

There was a great similarity in the undercurrent of thought disclosed. Yet here were just such people as we meet and associate with every day—pleasant, agreeable people. No one would suspect that any unrest or discontent existed in their cases. If the inner life and experience of people generally could be known, if those we meet and mingle with daily were to speak out as fully and as frankly as did these old friends with me, would we not find pretty much the same state of feeling? Experiences would be found to vary, different things would trouble and annoy different persons, aspirations would not be the same, but the proportion of those who are really restful and contented to those who are not, of those who are bearing their providential allotments in life patiently, without murmuring, cheerfully trying to

make the best of circumstances which they cannot control, would be surprisingly small.

Most people think their own cases exceptional, that no others have equally good reasons for feeling discontented; their own lot is peculiarly hard—considering all the circumstances, the very hardest in the world. They would n't blame any one for being miserable and wretched if his condition were half as bad as theirs. Yet, if the truth were known, those whose supposed favored lot is most envied, who are believed to have the fewest causes for discontent, who seem to be blessed with all that could be desired, as it appears to those looking on from without, even these would undoubtedly be found to have their burdens and anxieties, grievous to be borne, from which they long to escape. Because they cannot do so, they, too, are uneasy and discontented. They think they have reasons which fully justify their unrest.

There are some people who are bound to be discontented anyhow. It seems to be their disposition. Clouds and darkness are over their heads alike, whether it rains or shines. Every incident is an accident; every accident is a calamity. Even when they have their own way, they are dissatisfied, and consider their own voluntary acts as matters of compulsion.

A striking illustration of this is found in the conduct of a little child, a few years old, who was crying because his mother had shut the parlor door. "Poor thing," said a neighbor, "you have shut the child out." "It's all the same to him," said the mother, "he would cry if I called him in and shut the door. It is a peculiarity of that boy, that if he is left rather suddenly on either side of the door he considers himself shut out, and rebels accordingly." There are some other children who seem to take a similar view of things. No matter what occurs, there is nothing but complaint. They are chronic grumblers. Whatever the circumstances, they are ingenious enough to discover or to invent reasons for being dissatisfied.

The fact of discontent, therefore, may be set down as one of the stubborn realities of human life. Some are more discontented than others, but discontent seems to be the rule. It is a sad state of things. It is a sinful state of things.

What, then, is the remedy for it? What is the secret of a happy, contented life? Is it possible to live and to continue to live, in a peaceful, restful frame of mind, in spite of painful or unfortunate surroundings, in short, to learn, with Paul, in whatsoever state one is providentially placed, therein to be content? The inquiry is a very practical one.

In the instances mentioned, the radical difficulty was that the persons referred to were living according to an entirely wrong principle. Their idea was the very common but mistaken one that a man's real life consists in things—in the abundance of the things which he possesses; that peace of mind and contentment of spirit are necessarily or primarily dependent upon external circumstances rather than upon a condition of mind and heart, or upon the possession of certain qualities of character, or a certain spirit. The fallacy of this position is apparent when we remember that even when such people as these attain the objects upon which they have set their hearts, and from which they had expected contentment and happiness, they are really no more contented than before. That which has been so eagerly sought and at length has been attained, is found to be far less satisfactory than was anticipated. With these attainments new anxieties and cares, new wants and new ambitions, have come.

On the other hand, instances are not infrequent of those in the humblest circumstances, externally, and possessing the fewest possible advantages in this life, who cherish a tranquil, restful spirit, who are sincerely grateful that their condition is so favorable, who are perfectly content with the allotments of divine Providence.

That incident is in point here of the poor widow, who, not having sufficient bedclothes to shelter her little boy from the snow, which was blowing through the cracks of her miserable hovel, was wont to cover him up with boards. One night, after he had been protected in this way, he looked up smiling and happy, and said to her, "Mamma, what do you s'pose poor folks do these cold nights who have n't any boards to put over their little children?"

The truth is—and it is just here that so many err—the real seat of contentment is within. It is not in external conditions primarily, in material possessions, in the ability to gratify passing desires or whims, but rather in one's state of mind and heart. The source of contentment is inside, not outside, and is to be realized in a life of mastery over circumstances; in a spirit which can rise superior to external conditions.

But how is this contentment to be attained? It is the outcome of a deep, restful, trustful acquiescence in the will of God concerning us; it is a vital, practical, intelligent faith in a personal, all-wise, all-controlling Father in heaven. As one has said: it is "a confiding trust in the Sovereign of the world—a trust in his wisdom, to do always that which is best; a trust in his holiness, to do always that which is right; a trust in his love, to do always that which is good; it is a trust, in fact, which leads one really to believe, and to rest in the conviction, that all things, even mistakes, failures, disappointments, trials, actually 'work together for good to them that love God'" (Rom. 8:28). Long ago it was discovered that the secret of happiness is not in the things which we possess, but in the spirit with which we possess them. Long ago the secret was given to the world by the prophet, in words worthy to be written in letters of gold, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa. 26:3).

An abiding trust in God, let me repeat, in its fullest, most rational significance, lies at the basis of a contented, happy state of mind. With this trust, contentment of spirit is possible under the most forbidding external conditions. Without it, in the most favorable circumstances which this world can afford, there is no security against discontent. Neither the possession of all earth's exhaustless mines of silver and gold, nor all the knowledge and wisdom which the intellect can desire, nor all the pleasure that one has capacity to enjoy, can prevent its laying hold upon us, and making us wretched. Some of the most discontented people the world has known have been placed in the most favorable conditions in life, while some of the happiest, most tranquil, peaceful souls have been found among those who seemingly were the most unfortunate.

The possession of a contented spirit by no means hinders one from making an effort to better his external circumstances. The feeling is that surroundings, circumstances, conditions in life, are of God's purposing; that one does not come into his place in life by accident; that where he now is, God meant him to be. Whatever befalls has a profound significance. If prosperity comes, it is for a wise end. It brings responsibility and opportunity. If adversity is one's portion, it may mean needed discipline, patience, humility, or, if rightly received, it may be a test of faith, and become a source of spiritual enrichment, and a preparation for larger usefulness. In some way, in some high sense, whatever Providence brings about, or does not hinder from coming about, in our lives is all right. The trusting Christian may rest in the assurance that whatever comes is for some wise end, to teach some needed lesson, to lead to a more conscious dependence upon God and into closer relations with him. If this be true—and it seems plainly to be the teaching of Scripture—our chief concern should be to receive the lesson which God would impress; to try to extract from

the circumstances in which we are placed the blessing which is wrapped up in them; at any rate, not to miss, through a rebellious and discontented spirit, the rich things spiritually which we may reap from them.

When by the grace of God one has so risen above his circumstances that he is in a sense independent of them, he has reached a point where contentment of mind is possible; where, as in the case of Paul, discontent is impossible. In reality, it is not of so much consequence where one is, as what one is; not how great or how small one's material substance, as what is the character of one's spiritual possessions.

An impressive instance of a trustful and contented spirit, under trying conditions, once came under my observation. At the close of a preaching service, I was introduced to a blind man. He was fine-looking, intelligent, somewhat past middle life, but his eyes were sightless. I talked with him, found him cheerful and full of Christian devotion. "It was very hard at first, and for a long time," said he, "to feel reconciled to so great an affliction. I was frequently rebellious. But now," he continued, "I have come to feel not only that it is all right, but even to thank God for the loss of my sight. For now, as a result of it, my inner eyes have been opened, my inner vision has been greatly quickened, and the glory of God's love disclosed to me as never before. I would love to see, to see my friends, to see you, but it is all right as it is. I know it to be so, and I am full of thankfulness, contented and happy, under this providential allotment in life." A wonderful testimony to the power of the grace of God, is it not? A rebuke, also, to every one who allows himself to give way at times, as most persons do, to an uneasy, a discontented and rebellious spirit. The incident deeply impressed me, and it is a lesson to me every time it is recalled.

Such testimony as this is abundantly confirmed in the experience of Paul, that grand old hero of the cross, who

penned the remarkable words, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content" (Phil. 4:11); remarkable, certainly, when we consider the circumstances in which they were written, and the facts of his marvelous life, for they were not written in the heyday of prosperity, but when he was confined in Nero's prison at Rome, in which one of his active, ardent temperament might well be ill at ease. Indeed, from the very moment when he surrendered his worldly prospects and took up the service of Christ, he was beset with difficulty, hardship and danger. If ever any one had reason to be dissatisfied with his lot in life, it would seem as if he were that person. He was persecuted by his own countrymen; he was often obliged to fly for his life; yet no word of murmuring or of discontent escaped him. Not that he would not have appreciated exemption from such trials, but that he had learned the lesson that a man's real life is within, and that his truest joy is to be found in a conscious, personal, loving union with the living, loving Christ, who has appointed him to his lot, who has promised never to leave nor to forsake him, and who never does.

With this confidence the light afflictions (he calls them light) through which he was called to pass, were but for a moment, the prelude to something infinitely richer, grander and better, than all the best things, so-called, of this world. "Henceforth," he says, beyond this life, "there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness"—he was certain of it—"which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day" (2 Tim. 4:8). And so, whether it was in Philippi's dreadful dungeon, with a body lacerated and smarting from the strokes of the scourge; in the Holy City, with a raging, howling mob seeking his life; on the storm-tossed vessel on his way to Rome, liable at any moment to be engulfed; in all these experiences, which would ordinarily blanch a man's cheek and fill the soul with fear, he stood unmoved, for he rested, trustfully, peacefully, in the will of his God.

This shows the value of the prize which the Christian religion is able to bestow—a trustful, contented spirit in the midst of the most adverse external conditions. We may not attain, in a moment, to the contentment which follows from unwavering trust—Paul did not—but we may learn the lessons which he did, if we will, and thus, in our experience, approach nearer and nearer the point, where, in our lesser trials, we may calmly rest on God, trusting and knowing that all is well. Sorrow may come, sickness and loss; tribulation may roll in upon the soul like great billows, threatening to overwhelm; disappointment may overtake us in our life-plans; our external circumstances may be anything but satisfactory, and death may snatch away the friends we love, yet in the midst of all we may, by the grace of God, be able with Paul to affirm, “I am content—content in whatsoever state I am.” Even through blinding tears we may be able to look up and say, “Thy will be done,” and rest in the sweet assurance: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

Standing once upon a mountain summit, I was able to look down upon the gathering clouds, which were shutting out the sunlight from the people in the valley below, and which were soon to break upon them in rain and storm. All was calm and serene where I was, and the heavens were bright above. As I stood there meditating, the thought came to me, How blessed a thing it is to be able to live, as is our privilege, above the clouds and storms of this earthly life; calm and serene on the heights of faith; basking contentedly in the sunshine of the divine presence and love; able triumphantly to say, with the apostle, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content”!

BOOK III  
SERVICE



## X

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE DUTY OF PUBLIC CONFESSION OF CHRIST

It is no doubt true that there is a large number of Christian people outside the pale of the visible church. Many of these are regular attendants upon the sanctuary, are effective helpers in its activities, and are liberal contributors to its support and to all Christian benevolences. They seem to be in full sympathy with Christian enterprises, and give evidence that they are inwardly at one with Christ. For some reason, they are unwilling to identify themselves with his professed followers. They seem to be deaf to all appeals to connect themselves with the church, even to be unmoved by the fact that their attitude is a serious stumbling-block to others. It has come to be recognized among pastors that it is sometimes more difficult to prevail upon Christian people to unite with the church, than it is to persuade men to accept Christ.

Why this reluctance? Why is it that so many who give evidence of being Christian at heart refrain from performing a duty which, to those who have done so, seems an obvious duty?

The reasons which are given for this neglect of duty are many and various. Some of them deserve careful consideration. Others are merely excuses. Sometimes timidity is set up as the reason, a shrinking from the responsibilities which an open confession of Christ is supposed to involve. More often, perhaps, it is the outgrowth of misconception as to the nature and obligation of public confession, particularly as to what church membership signifies. It is not that converts are unwill-

ing to discharge a plain duty, to refuse to do which would be inconsistent with cherishing a Christian hope, but that, owing to some prejudice, or to defective views, it does not present itself definitely to their minds as a duty.

In the interest of clearness and with a view to removing barriers, it may be of advantage to call attention to some of these misconceptions, and then to set forth some positive reasons why Christian people should make open confession of their faith in Christ by uniting with the church.

A prevalent misconception is that public confession of Christ is in no sense obligatory, or at most that it is an entirely optional matter. Yet Christ's language upon this subject could not be more explicit. "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10: 32, 33). These are plain words, and their meaning is so unmistakable that it is in vain to try to explain it away or to evade its application. Even without the support of other passages of similar import, this would seem to be sufficient to make the duty of public confession of Christ, in some way, clear to any one who recognizes Jesus as Lord and Master.

"But," some one says, "granting this, are there not other methods of acknowledging Christ before men than by uniting with the church?" Doubtless; and the obligation is upon every loyal disciple to employ these methods wherever practicable. But why single out for rejection the one method which, since Christ's time, has been the recognized method of formally acknowledging him, one which he has signally blessed, and which the world recognizes as an obligation resting upon all Christian disciples? Christ founded the Church to be the chief instrumentality for carrying forward his cause

and kingdom. It is the only institution which he did found. In spite of imperfections and mistakes, it has been doing this through the centuries, and it is the main aggressive force of Christianity among men to-day. Furthermore, Christ established certain ordinances whose observance was enjoined upon his disciples, and these ordinances are ordinarily observed only in connection with his Church. So that even in the absence of specific command the duty of Christian people to identify themselves with the church would seem to be clearly implied.

Another misconception relates to the intellectual qualifications necessary for admission to the church. It is supposed by some persons that a certain amount of knowledge of the Scriptures, or of the great doctrines contained therein, is required as a condition of church membership, and that in taking the step, one assumes to possess such knowledge.

Not at all. One may have only a very general understanding of the aims of the church, only an imperfect acquaintance with the Scriptures or with their teachings, or even with the creed of the church, and yet be qualified for church membership. In an important sense, one comes to the church as a learner, and with the right spirit he can discover the meaning of spiritual truth far better within the church than outside of it. While it is assumed, as a rule, that a candidate for church membership is not without some conception of what the church believes, in reality the question of intellectual proficiency is not considered. There is no such thing in distinctively Protestant churches as an educational test for church membership. Its conditions relate rather to character and purpose.

Another misconception is to the effect that in order to unite with the church one must first attain to a certain standard of goodness. In other words, that there is a moral goodness test for those who desire to come into the church.

It is not so. One by no means assumes to be perfect, or to be one whit better, necessarily, than many others who have not publicly confessed Christ. The assumption, on the contrary, is just the reverse. It is that one may become better that one should avail himself of the help which church membership affords. The question is not what one has attained in the way of moral excellence; it is rather whether his purpose is fixed to do God's will. He may not be much of a saint when he makes his confession, he may not be free from inconsistencies of conduct after he has made it. Many of his besetting sins may still remain. But if he is truly converted, if his face is really turned heavenward, he is a suitable candidate for church membership. Union with the church is what one needs to help him to overcome himself and to develop Christian graces of character. It furnishes assistance with which one cannot afford to dispense.

Other misconceptions are such as these: that it is expected that one will be free from mistakes and sins after uniting with the church; that he will have no further seasons of discouragement or doubt; that he will be expected to engage in the same Christian activities and to employ precisely the same methods as other and more experienced church-members.

But these objections have no valid grounds on which to rest. One will probably stumble and fall from time to time after, as well as before uniting with the church. Church membership does not insure against that, although one is less liable to do so, in view of the restraints and incentives which are brought to bear upon him as an openly confessed follower of Christ. Nor is it implied that one will not have ups and downs of experience. The mere fact of church membership will not free one from the infirmities of the flesh. The prevailing influence of the church will, however, tend to promote a hopeful and courageous spirit. Nor does one endorse the church in

all its action, as some suppose, by uniting with it, or endorse all the individual members of it, any more than he endorses any other organization with which he sees fit to connect himself. The church is not infallible, never has been, never will be, nor has it been free from unworthy members or from cranks. It is made up of imperfect people, which is the only kind of people available for this or for any other organization in this world. Nor is it implied that all who unite with the church will be alike active, or engage in Christian work in precisely the same way. This is not the case in any other sphere in life. One by no means loses his individuality by uniting with the church. There is a place and a work for every believer, whatever his peculiar talent.

What, then, is the true significance of uniting with the church? Simply this: that one honestly proposes to turn his back upon a sinful life, and to strive, with divine help, to live a Christian life, and that he makes formal announcement to the world of this fact by publicly confessing Christ. It means that one acknowledges Jesus Christ to be his Lord and Saviour, and that it is his purpose henceforth to be loyal and obedient to him. He pledges himself to this purpose, however, in full view of his own weakness, and with distrust of himself, but with full confidence in that almighty grace upon which he depends to carry it out. He promises to do the best he can, with divine aid. This is all that he promises, all that any one can promise. Thus, he does not profess or promise to be sinless, or to do any impossible or unreasonable thing. He makes a public announcement to men, friends, acquaintances, everybody, of his position on the question of his relationship with God. It means that he recognizes the obligation, to say nothing of the privilege, of joining himself with others who have similar aims, for sympathy and help and for the sake of rendering more effective Christian service;

he does this because it is the method, sanctioned by long usage, as well as implied in the direct commands of Christ, of confessing him before men. Henceforth his sympathies and his interests are to be identified with Christian people. He proposes to act with them, and through union with them to make his influence more effective for Christ and for righteousness.

This is what is involved in taking a public stand for Christ in connection with the church. It does not insure salvation—there is no warrant for any such assumption. Salvation itself comes only through faith in Christ. The church is designed to nourish and promote the Christian life of believers, but of itself it does not save one. Church membership is simply one of the duties incumbent upon such as have entered upon the new life.

Having seen what is meant by uniting with the church, how simple and natural a thing it is for the Christian to do, we notice next some of the reasons which are often urged against taking the step.

Some shrink from uniting with the church because they regard themselves as unworthy, or because they fear that they might bring reproach upon it. But the existence of such a feeling, honestly cherished, is one of the best indications that one is fitted for church membership. Yet, while the feeling itself is commendable, it is not, of itself, a sufficient reason why one should remain outside the visible body of believers. It is quite true that no one is worthy the honor of bearing Christ's name, yet this privilege is freely accorded to all who are striving to live the Christian life. Those, indeed, who feel themselves least worthy are quite likely to be the most worthy.

The objection that one is not good enough assumes that there is a moral goodness test for church membership, which, as we have shown, is a misconception of what church membership is. If one were without fault, were free from sin, were perfect, there would be no need of

confessing Christ, no need of Christ's life and sufferings and death. It is because no one is good enough that Christ bids us be his disciples. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. And it is because we are not as good as we ought to be, even when we have become his disciples, that we need the help and incentives of the church in order to become better. Many have tried the experiment of waiting until they should become "good enough" before uniting with the church, only to learn the folly of so doing. By the common testimony of all such, this is a great and a serious mistake. Nor is it, in fact, perfect or self-satisfied people whom Christ wants in his Church; those rather who have a deep sense of their own imperfection, and who desire to avail themselves of all possible helps to become more Christlike.

Nor need one delay becoming a church-member from a fear that by so doing he may bring reproach upon the church and cause. No one who is seeking sincerely to do his duty as a Christian need entertain such a fear. It is not such as these who discredit the church; it is those, rather, who are careless as to their duty. As a matter of fact, one can do more to discredit a church before the world by refusing to unite with it, than he is likely to do as a faithful member of it.

Some, again, before uniting with a church, would wait to see whether they are likely to hold out in the Christian life. Such persons overlook the fact that church membership is one of the divinely appointed means of helping one to persevere in the divine life. Suppose, as one says, a new-born lamb, out in the icy sleet at nightfall, should refuse to be carried into the barn and be cared for, on the ground that it might be better to wait and see whether it were going to hold out through the night! Equally unreasonable is it for one newly born into the kingdom to wait and see whether he can hold out against the dangers of the world, or become toughened by exposure to its perils, before coming into the church. Through such

exposure many have become spiritually dead. Instead of becoming toughened against the forces of evil, they have usually become hardened against spiritual influences.

Then, again, how long a time is necessary in order to determine the question as to whether one is to hold out or not? six months? one year? two years? Who ever heard of any one feeling better satisfied with himself on this point, no matter how long he had tested himself? The probability of "holding out" in the Christian course is certainly much greater when one surrounds himself with the encouragements and incentives to holiness and the restraints from evil which the church affords than when one does not avail himself of these helpful influences.

Others, still, are not entirely satisfied that they are Christians, because they cannot point to the exact moment when the transition from the old to the new life took place, and hold back from uniting with the church for this reason. It is not probable that one half of those who are Christians or church members can do this. Tests have been made which demonstrate the fact that at least half of those whom we know as Christians cannot tell the precise moment when they became Christians.

The vital question is not as to the time, or manner, or the attending circumstances of entering upon the Christian life; it is rather as to whether the transition from the old to the new life has really taken place, whether one is or is not a Christian. It might be a satisfaction to be able to point to the exact moment of one's conversion, but this is a matter of minor consequence. If one born blind is now able to see, he ought to be willing to say so.

Others, again, do not unite with the church because they are unwilling to relinquish certain questionable lines of conduct, which they suppose or believe to be inconsistent with a public confession of Christ. But if that which holds them back is inconsistent with the cherishing

of a Christian hope inside the church, why is it not equally inconsistent with cherishing a Christian hope outside the church? Wherein does the fact of not being a church-member relieve one of responsibility? The obligation of public confession rests upon a Christian just the same, whether he recognizes and meets it or not. The mere fact of remaining outside the church by no means frees one from responsibility. Whether within or without the church, men are bound to obey every command of Christ.

The truth is, the fear that one's liberties would be abridged or some of one's enjoyments be cut off if one were to unite with the church is hardly a worthy reason for one who really cherishes a hope that he is a Christian disciple. No doubt there are multitudes who would be in the Christian Church to-day if it were not for a secret fear that some of their practices, which they are not entirely satisfied are consistent with a Christian profession, would have to be surrendered. They want to be Christians, but they want to retain some of their worldly privileges. They are not quite ready to surrender everything to Christ. If one has really surrendered himself to Christ, he will be ready and willing to abandon everything which his conscience disapproves. Where questions of duty are not entirely clear, one must exercise his best judgment and pray for God's blessing upon his conclusion. If he has not surrendered all, but is deliberately holding back a part of the price, what reason has he for cherishing any hope in Christ? The only consistent course for one who is a Christian to pursue is to take his place with the people of God.

Others tell us that they can live the Christian life just as well without uniting with the church. How do they know this? The uniform testimony of those who have joined the church and who alone are competent to give testimony on this point, disproves the assertion. They declare that their experience teaches them that it is far harder to lead a Christian life outside the church than as



a member of it. Many who have attempted to do this have failed, and the world has not known that they ever indulged a Christian hope. It would be too much to say that we cannot, in any circumstances, live a Christian life outside the church, but one certainly cannot do it as well, to say nothing of Christ's definite injunction in regard to open confession. One has not the same stimulus, help, or restraint, outside the church which he has as one of its members. Furthermore, he is defrauding the church and the cause of the influences which result from taking a positive position before the world. The probability in most cases is that, by remaining outside the church, one's Christian hope will gradually fade and die. There is something in the mere fact of church membership which is calculated to awaken and sustain a deeper interest in the Christian life and Christian work.

Another reason often urged against uniting with the church, is the fact of the inconsistencies, the faults, the hypocrisies, even, of certain church-members.

But how does the fact that here and there one in the church may be unworthy relieve another of the obligation of confessing Christ? Is the fact that some men who have professed themselves to be honest have turned out to be knaves any reason why others should refuse to be honest, or to profess their honest intentions? Is the existence of a Benedict Arnold any reason that we should refuse to profess our loyalty to the government of the United States? Is the fact that some dishonor their Christian profession a good and sufficient reason why others should decline to make such a profession? How could any one, upon this principle, consistently identify himself with any political party? There is occasionally a bad Republican, and sometimes a bad Democrat. Such instances are not altogether unknown. Or how can one consistently belong to a lodge? Not all of its members are saints, yet who ever raises objection to membership in it on such grounds as these? The truth is, this last

objection is one of the most unreasonable and least worthy of the objections which are urged against uniting with the church. It is a flimsy excuse, and nothing more. It is unfortunate that some church-members do not live up to their obligations. It is impossible perfectly to guard against making mistakes in receiving members into the church. Yet the duty of public confession of Christ on the part of Christian people exists independently of the fact that some fail in meeting their obligations to him. Other men's failures will not save us, or in the least excuse us from doing what is clearly our duty.

Another reason often urged by Christian women for not at once uniting with the church, is something like this: "I want to wait for my husband. It would be so much more pleasant for us both to join at the same time, and, besides, I am afraid that if I should join without him, he never would take the step. I can't bear to be separated from him." This all sounds very nice and plausible, but the facts of experience do not justify the position taken in this objection.

What ground is there for supposing that the husband is becoming any nearer ready to take the step because his wife remains outside the church, or that he is any nearer a Christian life now than he was two, five, ten years ago? Is it not quite probable that he is even less and less inclined to it? Example is the strongest kind of an argument in such a case, and for the wife to continue outside the church is often but to confirm the husband in an irreligious life. A prompt performance of her own duty might have exerted a far more wholesome influence upon him. Furthermore, how can one justify himself in neglecting duty because some one else neglects it? Each one must give account for himself before God. Very often believing wives have waited long and weary years for their husbands to be converted, depriving themselves, meanwhile, of the comforts and helps and the blessedness which the church is designed

to afford, to say nothing of depriving the church all this time of the influence which a positive, open confession would have given it. Then, after all this waiting, the husband, as a rule, has not become a Christian. As for the separation from which loving wives shrink, a great gulf already exists between them and their husbands. That which is of deepest moment to one is a matter of indifference, or largely so, with the other. For a Christian woman to unite with the church is merely to give expression to a fact that already exists. It by no means creates the separation between herself and her husband. Every Christian ought to do his duty regardless of the fact that some one else refuses to do his duty.

Another person thinks that he cannot subscribe to all that is contained in the confession of faith of the church. In very few of our churches is one asked to subscribe to or to believe anything which is not taught in the Word of God. A confession or creed is merely a human attempt to summarize the fundamental teachings of Scripture. It may be very imperfect, but it represents what those who profess it believe to be the main teachings of the Bible, which is the only authority in matters of faith and practice.

But, important as right views are, a right life is more important. The conditions of acceptance with Christ, which he himself lays down, are repentance of sin and faith in himself. When one presents himself for admission to the church, gives satisfactory evidence of a penitent, believing, teachable spirit, and makes it clear that it is his purpose sincerely and faithfully to obey God, and with his help serve him, we have no right to exclude him from Christian fellowship or from fellowship in a particular church, unless his doctrinal views are so far at variance with the generally accepted teachings of the church as would tend to promote discord and disturbance, rather than harmony and peace. Sometimes men's hearts are more orthodox than their heads.

Another person says, "There's no church of my denominational preference near at hand." Well, granting that to be the case, is that a sufficient reason for not identifying oneself with that Christian church which is nearest at hand, at least for the time being? Christ is higher than denominationalism. The Church universal is larger than any one branch of it. Of course if one feels that he would be safe only in his own particular church, that is one thing. Such a one needs to be educated to a larger view of the truth. All the leading evangelical denominations are essentially agreed in matters of doctrine. They differ on minor points, but upon the fundamentals they are not far apart. The main differences between them relate to methods of church government, relatively of small moment. If one is not so situated as conveniently to attend or to join the church of his choice, the sensible course to pursue would seem to be to cast in his lot with that Christian church near by, which is willing to receive him. One needs a church home, and he ought to identify himself with the Christian people where he is, and to make his influence felt for good in his own neighborhood. His influence is not likely to count for much if he acts independently. Our Lord is not seriously concerned as to what particular branch of his Church one may join, providing it be one which is loyal to him, and one in which his disciple can feel at home, and unite heartily with its members in Christian service.

If we carry our devotion to our church so far that we cannot affiliate with any other church or denomination, or regard that other with any degree of allowance, we are in danger of worshiping that church more than its Head. This is idolatry. Any church of Christ, where one is made welcome, and wherein he can feel at home, is good enough for any Christian who cannot, for any reason, connect himself with a church of his own particular preference.

Others, again, have a secret feeling that it would in

some way be a confession of weakness to come out openly for Christ. The very fact of cherishing such a reason is in itself a confession of weakness; while in reality to stand up publicly for Christ is one of the most manly or womanly things which one can possibly do.

Some persons hold back, or hold their children back from the church on the ground that they are not old enough. Does the church exist only for full-grown, well-matured believers? Must one be a man or woman grown before entering the nursery? Is not the nursery for babes? In an important sense, the church is a nursery, and we are all children in it. The question is not primarily how old or how strong one is, but whether he loves Christ, and the weaker he is, the more the comfort and the training of the church are needed. Any one who is old enough to love Christ intelligently, and to give reasonable evidence that he is seeking conscientiously to obey him, especially if the home influences about him are helpful, is old enough to become a member of the church. Sometimes parents discourage their children from making a public confession of their love for Christ, and they reach the age of twelve, fourteen, sixteen, even eighteen and twenty years, before they are willing to have them do so. This is a serious responsibility for parents to assume. If children are not allowed to take the step when they incline strongly to do so, they may never again feel interested to the same degree.

Another person says, "I want more time to think about it." Is not this a mistaken idea? The subject is not altogether new. The objector has not been taken by surprise. He has thought about it long, and he knew, years ago, perhaps, as well as any of us do now, that it was his duty to make open confession of Christ. Yet how much nearer is he to the performance of that duty now than then? No, it is not more time to think about it that is needed; it is more resolution to do what one has long known it to be one's duty to do.

These and similar reasons are urged against making public confession of Christ in connection with his Church. The mind is exceedingly fertile in originating objections against doing a thing which one really does not want to do. Some of these reasons are seriously urged, and are to be met in corresponding spirit; others are mere excuses. The latter are swept away when one has the right spirit, just as all one's excuses for not being a Christian are swept away in a moment, when he comes to cherish the right spirit.

What, then, are some of the *positive* reasons why Christian people should unite with the church?

1. It is the only natural and consistent course for a Christian to pursue, or for one who cherishes a hope that he is a Christian.

Here is God's Church in the world. Christ himself established it. It is an organization made up of those who acknowledge him, and is expressly designed both to promote their spiritual benefit and to render their influence for his cause the more effective. It is the one recognized organization which is doing this. Membership in it for ages has been the recognized method of making formal confession of faith in Christ. The fact that there are various divisions in the Church universal, which are known by different names, makes no particular difference. All are alike to be entered by baptism as the outward form of admission, and Christ coupled baptism with believing in a manner which forbids its being regarded as optional. Similarly, in regard to the Lord's Supper, another ordinance which Christ instituted. Usually this ordinance has been observed in connection with his Church, and, like baptism, it ought not to be dispensed with when its observance is possible.

These considerations would seem to show that the natural, the consistent course for one who cherishes a Christian hope is at once to take his place with professing

Christian people in the church. Otherwise his position is sure to be misinterpreted. Only in this way is he counted where he belongs. As a matter of fact, the world identifies Christians with church-members, and it is expected that those who are truly Christian will make public announcement of their faith. If they do not do this, but still live blamelessly before men, what is to hinder their being classed with other men of good character, moral men, who make no pretension whatever to faith in Christ, who may even be hostile to the Christian religion? Irreligion gets the credit of Christian graces, and the cause of Christ is defrauded of that which is its rightful due, is wounded in the home of its friends. Frequently it is said of such people as these: "They are as good as any of your Christians." So one's position is misinterpreted, and one's Christian influence goes pretty nearly for nothing. The truth is, Christians who ought to be in the church, but who refuse to unite with it, do about as much harm by their unnatural attitude as do those professing Christians whose character and conduct show that they ought not to be in the church.

There can be no question, then, that to join some visible branch of the Christian Church is the duty of every real follower of Christ, unless his circumstances are so peculiarly exceptional—a rare possibility—that it would be manifestly impracticable. In the early times of Christianity, so solemn a duty was it regarded that no reproaches of the world or tyranny of government could deter Christian believers from open avowal of their faith, although in a multitude of instances it was followed by persecution and death. There is certainly no reason to suppose it to be less a duty now, in an age when so little sacrifice and no perils whatever are involved.

2. A second reason for uniting with the church is because a Christian needs its helps and incentives for his own spiritual welfare.

The ruling purpose of the Christian, in so far as his

own life and character are concerned, is to grow in holiness, to make progress in grace, to advance toward the symmetry of a developed spiritual character—in short, to become more Christlike in every respect. For a Christian to be without such aspiration and purpose would be a contradiction of terms, as it would also be not to utilize all available helps to that end.

One of the objects of a church is to promote the spiritual development of its members. No other organization exists for this distinctive end; no other has such facilities for promoting it. By its public services and instructions, by its inspirations, by its sacraments, by its meetings for prayer and praise, by its warm fraternal sympathy and its varied means of grace, it is calculated most effectively to give stimulus and strength to those who are in the Christian way. The fact itself of a public committal to the Christian life tends to restrain from evil and to stimulate to right effort, while to be surrounded by others who are of the same mind and to breathe the atmosphere of holy aspiration cannot fail to be a powerful incentive to press on in the heavenly path. The spirit of religious earnestness is contagious.

Then, too, it is only within the church that one enters into the closest relations of Christian fellowship, and realizes the deepest satisfaction from this source. There are here a tender appreciation and a faithful cooperation which cannot be found elsewhere. Not only is one recognized as entitled to Christian sympathy and love in a peculiar degree, but when the true Christian spirit prevails, Christian people take delight in manifesting it. The church is a family, and its members are related to each other through kinship with Christ. It is a household of faith, made up of those with common aims and hopes, all alike striving for the same ends. What is there, indeed, which can be more helpful in nourishing and stimulating one's Christian purposes and in deepening his Christian experiences than such a fellowship as this?

The truth is, a Christian defrauds himself most seriously if he fails to avail himself of the aids to Christian living and Christian growth which are supplied by the Christian church. If he does not take advantage of them, he runs great risk of relapsing into spiritual coldness and worldliness, if not of abandoning the Christian life altogether. One of the surest ways to shrivel up spiritually, to lose a Christian hope, and to become indifferent to truth and righteousness, is to dispense with the means of grace which are provided for his welfare within the Christian church. It is difficult enough to live and to make progress in the Christian life even with the use of all the helps which are available. To ignore these helpful agencies, as if they were superfluous, would seem to be the height of folly.

3. A third reason for uniting with the church is that a Christian may in this way the more effectively promote Christ's cause in the world.

To do this is one of the fundamental objects of the Christian life. It is not only the unfolding of the Christian graces of character, it is also to make one's influence felt in the largest degree for the advancement of Christ's cause and kingdom. But we know well how any cause, as a rule, is greatly increased in power and effectiveness through organization. It was the organized army which crushed the Rebellion and reestablished the authority of the government. It was not done, it never would have been done, by a mass of unenlisted, undisciplined, single shooters. These latter would have stood a good chance of being captured, to say nothing of the embarrassment they would have occasioned those who were bearing the responsibility of the campaigns.

So of Christian people outside the church. What they accomplish for Christ, or can accomplish, is relatively small in comparison with what they might accomplish if they were working in cooperation with others in an organized capacity, while in their isolation they are in

constant danger of being themselves overborne by subtle forces of evil which are lurking secretly everywhere about them. It is by organized missionary effort that the heathen world is being invaded and gradually overcome for Christ. It is by organization that business enterprises are made to succeed, that political and philanthropic and reform movements are promoted; and it is equally important that the forces of Christ should in like manner be organized, in order to their greatest efficiency and to insure their highest success.

The Christian Church is an organization which Christ himself established, and by which this world was to be redeemed. Other organizations have grown out of it for the promotion of special Christian ends, but this was and remains the one great agency designed to carry the gospel over the world and everywhere to establish the kingdom of God. In it, there is a place and a work for every believer; in it every variety of talent may be utilized. As this organization, equipped in all departments for service, moves steadily forward, its influence and power are brought to bear with ever-increasing momentum against the forces of evil.

There can be no question that the need of the hour is that all who are at heart loyal to Christ should show their colors, enlist and stand together, both against the great evils of the world and in behalf of righteousness and truth. If any fail to do this—parents, teachers, employers, friends—the children, the young people, the unconverted generally, are quick to perceive the inconsistency of their course and to make it an excuse for not doing their own duty. That they have no right to do this makes no difference. They do it. Furthermore, if I may justify myself in remaining outside the church for any reason whatever, why may not another justify himself in doing the same for some other reason? One man may think that there are peculiar reasons in his particular case which should excuse him from taking a public stand for

Christ, but the ninety-nine others of the hundred can with equal propriety urge the same or similar reasons why they also should be exempt from this duty. If all Christians should excuse themselves—and one person has the same right to do this as another—what would become of the Christian Church and of organized Christian effort, and of the cause of Christ generally? No; we who love Christ have no right to weaken our influence and withhold our help by refusing boldly to express our allegiance to our Lord. It is defrauding the Church and the cause to do so. They are entitled to the support of the friends of Christ, to the added influence of their names, to the enlarged strength of increased numbers, and to all the assistance which they are able to render. Christ loves the Church as the apple of his eye, and he has shown plainly that he desires its prosperity. Clearly, therefore, any Christian who withholds his influence and help from it, even if his assistance may not be large, is by so much defrauding the cause of Christ, and Christ himself, of that which is his rightful due. By remaining outside of its membership, the weight of his influence is really cast against the cause he loves.

4. Finally, the Church needs the help of every believer, and solicits it.

The battle is on. Grave interests are at stake, the highest interests of every community. The influences of the world are pressing hard. Great evils exist. Inroads are being made upon Christian institutions. Sabbath-desecration is growing, corruption is rife, infidelity is rampant. The Church is battling bravely, but its forces are none too strong. Some of its most earnest members have fallen in their places, some have deserted, and the burden for those who remain is great. In many communities the Church is weak, its numbers are small, its influence is not as strong as it ought to be, and the work languishes. Yet there are many in most communities who are at heart the friends of Christ and

who would rejoice at the success of his cause, who are unknown; who never speak out; who fail to identify themselves with any branch of the Christian Church. They may be regarded as good people, but not as Christian people, or, if they are, their influence usually counts for little or naught, and this for the simple reason that they will not declare themselves and join heart and hand with those who are bearing the heat and burden of the day. Reinforcements are needed if the warfare is to be vigorously and successfully prosecuted. To this end there should be a rallying of those who are at heart united, who alike believe in the truth as it is in Christ, but who are now unenlisted, and who stand aloof. It is a glorious work and it is bound to triumph, but its success is delayed because of the great army of inactive ones outside, who yet cherish a secret hope in Christ. In view of these facts, the pressing need, the earnest solicitation of the Church itself, the wishes of Christ, is not the indifference of so many to the real interests of the Church a proof that they have not really known Christ?

The reasons we have been urging for publicly confessing Christ through church membership apply equally to those who are members of churches in other communities which they cannot now attend. Many of these persons hold letters from these churches, which they have never presented. Many a church, now weak and struggling, would be strong if only all those in its neighborhood who have or are entitled to letters from churches with which they have been connected were to rally to its support. It seems strange that their sense of obligation to Christ should be so slight. His cause is suffering for want of their help, and they do not render it.

We have now endeavored to explain what church membership is and involves, and what it is not, and to point out the obligation of Christian believers to make public confession of their Lord in connection with the church.

We have sought to show the fallacy of various reasons commonly offered for not joining the church, and to clear away the misconceptions which many entertain in regard to this step. We have given a number of positive reasons why a Christian should publicly confess his faith in Christ. It is the only natural and consistent course for him to pursue. His own spiritual welfare requires it. Only in this way will he be able to render the most effective service for Christ. The Church needs the help of every friend of the Master, and earnestly solicits it. By remaining without, one's position is certain to be misinterpreted and made a stumbling-block to others. A Christian owes it to himself, to other Christians, to those who are not Christians, to Christ, to identify himself with the one institution which his Master has established, and which was intended not only to nourish the spiritual life of believers but to organize and inspire them for effective and triumphant service in the Kingdom of God. The duty is plain, the privilege is great. Can any one really be a loyal disciple who deliberately refuses to array himself on the side of Christ?

## XI

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO WHAT CONSTITUTES A SUCCESSFUL CHURCH

Having seen what a church is and what it means to join a church, we now ask what a church is for? What is its real object, and what the aim of its Founder? How may that aim be most effectively reached? These questions are vitally related to the progress of the kingdom of God in the world. Yet misconceptions in respect to the matters referred to in the above questions are not uncommon. Some of them are exceedingly mischievous in their effects, since the views which men hold give character and direction to their activities. A few of these misconceptions may be indicated.

In the thought of some, a church is a company of holy persons gathered out of the world, to worship God in loving fellowship, to sit together in heavenly places, to share each other's joys, to sympathize with each other's sorrows, looking longingly, meanwhile, for a speedy translation into the realms of everlasting bliss. According to this idea, the church is simply a society to promote the present and prospective blessedness of its members. It has little concern for the spiritual welfare of those outside its membership. This is a very selfish conception of the function and purpose of a church.

Others go to the other extreme, and lay the main stress upon the mission of the church to the world. It is to preach the gospel, to bear witness to the truth, to illustrate its power. Its hands are to be constantly stretched out to the unbelieving and the ungodly. Every minister and every member is to be an evangelist, echoing all the while the Master's invitation, "Come unto me." This view is

an improvement upon the preceding, in that it does not lay the church open to the charge of selfishness, but it is defective in not recognizing and providing for the spiritual growth and culture of its members.

Others lay special emphasis upon the hospital idea of a church. The church is not designed for those who have a vigorous spiritual life; it is rather and chiefly for the weak, for the maimed, for those who are liable to stumble and err. These stumbling ones must not be cast out or despised, even though they repeatedly yield to temptation or fall into open sin again and again. God forgives times without number; a church should do likewise. The church is a place of wholesome and curative influences, an institution for nursing the feeble, a hospital for spiritual patients. There is an element of truth in the view we have here given, although it can hardly be said to be sufficiently comprehensive and accurate to be accepted without qualification. Such a view is not calculated to develop the highest type of spiritual manhood.

There are those also who think of the church as an army. It is an organization for warfare, for pulling down the strongholds of Satan. A charge is to be made upon evils of all kinds, and campaigns in the interest of righteousness are to be inaugurated. The militant idea takes precedence of all others. The military is no doubt an important aspect of the work of the kingdom. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil, and we are not to disregard his example in this respect. But there is need for positive and constructive work, as well as for that which is negative and destructive. The former, indeed, constitutes the main responsibility of believers. As righteousness and truth are built up and prevail, evil and error must necessarily give way.

Others, still, would make the church to be the center and source of all benevolent, reformatory and philanthropic effort. But the question may well be raised whether this conception, if dominant, would not inevit-

ably lead the Church into entangling and mischievous alliances, to say nothing of the tremendous if not crushing burdens which would be imposed upon it in the attempt to lead and superintend the reformatory and uplifting enterprises of the time. The spirit which the gospel inculcates should and does prompt men to humanitarian endeavor, but this does not mean that the Church is to be humanitarian and nothing else. It should be a center and source of inspiration to everything noble and good, and in a very important sense it may be regarded as successful in proportion as it impels men to go forth and engage in beneficent service for their fellow men, but it can hardly be expected to look after the details of the multifarious schemes for the weal of men which a spirit of love may devise.

Others again, in practice if not in theory, emphasize the idea of culture. The church is a sort of college, a place for lectures, literary essays, or sermons upon religious and other subjects for the intellectual profit of those who hear them. In such circumstances there is little call for spiritual truth, and little or none is given. Or the social club idea is prominent, and intrusion by the multitude, or the common people, is not encouraged.

These are some of the differing conceptions which are entertained respecting the nature and function of a Christian church. Some truth enters into each of these conceptions, but no one of them includes the whole truth. Each needs to be supplemented, and all need to be made broader, more exact, to correspond with the Scriptural view. A definition of the Church, to be complete, must include the idea of culture, intellectual and spiritual, the idea of help for those who are weak and needy, the idea of aggression against sin as ruling in individual hearts, or as entrenched in the prevailing sentiments and customs of society. These are expressed by the terms, "edify" and "multiply." A church is an institution composed of believers. It is designed, first, to promote

mutual helpfulness, spiritual development, and edification or upbuilding in the faith. This includes all that the individual Christian needs for instruction, for comfort, for strength, for growth, for preparation for usefulness. These ends are to be realized through Christian fellowship and helpfulness, and the varied means of grace which the regularly constituted church affords. Secondly, a church is an organization for aggressive Christian effort, especially for the multiplication of believers. It is to make war upon evil, to alleviate human suffering and need, but, above all, it is to seek to win men to Christ. In general, it is designed to exert a wholesome and uplifting Christian influence upon society, but primarily it is to labor for the salvation of men and their upbuilding in the faith. It is intended to be a fountain of spiritual blessing in the community in which it is planted. In a very important sense it should serve as the conscience of the community.

This sufficiently indicates the Scriptural idea of a church. It is so in building up a Christian character. There must first be the ideal or pattern which is given in the life and example of Christ. If a body of Christian people would form a church which shall most effectively realize the ends and aims of the Founder of Christianity, it is of highest consequence that they have a clear conception or ideal of what constitutes a really successful church. They are then prepared to bend their energies to the attainment of it.

We come now to the very practical question as to what, precisely, constitutes a truly successful church. The importance of holding correct ideals before the mind is recognized in all departments of endeavor. It was so in the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness, which was to be fashioned after the pattern or ideal which was disclosed to Moses in the mount. It is so in the construction of a dwelling-house, of a public building or a man-of-war.

But here, as everywhere, we are confronted with many misconceptions. Much passes for success, which, in reality, is not success at all. Superficial views dominate the thought and give direction to the activities of too many churches. The popular idea of what constitutes a prosperous, flourishing church is often misleading, sometimes entirely erroneous. Some churches are popularly accounted strong and prosperous which when measured by the Scripture standard would be found lacking in the essentials of real success.

If a church, for example, has much wealth, is able to provide itself a costly edifice, elegant furnishings, expensive music and preaching; if its treasury is never empty, it is considered by many, by most, perhaps, to be in a highly flourishing condition. It may be so, but as a matter of fact, spiritual poverty prevails in many of our wealthiest churches. Money alone, important as it is, cannot, by itself, insure true church success. Something more than money is requisite. Abundant material resources are not to be disparaged. Rightly used, they constitute a powerful aid in securing the true ends of a church.

But, the vital question is, Is this wealth, are these material resources consecrated? Do those who possess them regard themselves as God's stewards? Do they realize that the property which they call their own is not, in reality, theirs, but the Lord's, and that it is only entrusted to them, like the talents in the parable, and that they are responsible for the right use of it. Do they hold it subject to God's call? If so, if that is the spirit in which Christian people employ their means, large or small, abundant material resources in a church may prove a great blessing, and tremendously augment its power of usefulness. Otherwise, they may be a curse, a millstone about its neck.

Again, a church which includes in its ranks the leading social and cultured elements of a community, the *elite*, so

termed, is usually regarded as particularly fortunate. It may be so, but it does not follow that those who stand highest in society stand highest before God. Social standing and culture, if fully consecrated, add immensely to the strength of a church, and to its usefulness. The vital question relates to their consecration. Christian culture and Christian society may be so saturated with worldliness, so blind to that which is most vital in the Christian life, so indifferent to the obligations of aggressive Christian service, as to be a drawback rather than an advantage to the church to which they belong.

Again, the success of a church is often measured by its numbers, either in membership or in the congregation attending its services. Large numbers may indicate success, but do not do so necessarily. Various influences operate to draw people into church relationships, various motives prompt their flocking to public worship. Sometimes it is the music, sometimes it is the elegant appointments of the church building, sometimes it is social influences, sometimes it is the popularity or eccentricity of the preacher, or the sensational character of his themes, which draws. A thousand things may operate to attract the crowds and to lead people to unite with the church.

It is, of course, very desirable to have large numbers. One aim of the church is to gather the people in, to bring them under sanctuary influences. To this end all legitimate means may be, ought to be, often are employed. The services should be attractive; the place where they are held should be cheerful and inviting. The vital question as to the members is, how many of them are really consecrated; how many of them keep their covenant vows; how many are fulfilling their Christian obligations? When this is true of the majority of the members of any given church, the larger it is the better. Otherwise, size may prove weakness. The three hundred selected out of Gideon's army who shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," were mightier, under God, than the

original thirty thousand. A small number of earnest, devoted Christian people, who are thoroughly consecrated to God, property and all, and who are heart and soul interested in his work, ready and eager to do all in their power to promote it, make a far stronger church than a host of half-hearted, worldly, indifferent people, no matter how wealthy, or how high they stand socially, who have only a name to live but are spiritually dead.

The truth is, much that passes for church prosperity is only semblance. It is superficial. We must look below the surface if we would discover the real secret of success in church life and work, or learn what are the fundamental principles of its real prosperity.

What, then, are some of the positive elements which are essential for the formation of a really strong and prosperous church?

In general, it may be said that these elements will be found within the church rather than in its external circumstances; in its spiritual rather than in its material condition; in the spiritual quality of its membership, rather than merely in its social standing, its culture, or its wealth.

1. First of all, a church, to be truly strong and effective, must be thoroughly rooted and grounded in God's Word. This is the soil from which its nourishment is mainly to be drawn. This Word contains that which is divinely adapted to the sustenance and growth of the spiritual life. This is the foundation which was laid for the Church by apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. History teaches us that that church or denomination which has remained most loyal to this Word has had the most vitality, has been the most aggressive in Christian service, and has exerted the most positive influence. The winds of worldliness blowing about it or the floods of skepticism breaking against it have been powerless to disturb or to undermine it, for it has been founded upon a rock.

On the other hand, the church which has allowed itself to drift from its Scriptural moorings and has substituted human philosophy or speculation for the teachings of the Word has uniformly lost its spiritual vitality, its hold upon men, its power of saving them. In times of testing it has been found to have been built upon the sand.

2. A second element of strength in a church is in the character of its members. A church is strong and prosperous in proportion as those who stand for it before the world are seeking sincerely to conform their lives to the spirit and standards of Christ.

The Church exists—and the world so understands it—to make people better. It is expected, and properly so, that those who have taken upon themselves the name of Christ will be good men and good women. If this is not the case, or in so far as it is not, the church is a failure, is counted as a failure, and the Christian religion discredited. Let a Christian disciple fall seriously short in his daily life, let him be dishonest in business, disregard his just obligations, fail to pay his bills; let him be hypocritical or mean or in any way dishonor his profession; how quickly men make note of it, make unfavorable comment upon it and upon the Christian religion and the Christian Church! “There’s one of your church-members!” they sneeringly say. Thus the Church suffers, its influence is weakened, its power of usefulness is undermined, the cause of Christ is retarded.

For Christianity and the Church are judged by the lives of professed believers. These are the object-lessons which the world studies. The world may be unreasonable in its judgments; may be indifferent to the character of the Head of the Church and the spirit which he inculcates; may overlook the many faithful and devoted persons who bear his name and whose lives are above reproach; but, reasonable or unreasonable, the Christian religion and the Christian Church are studied by the world in the lives of professed Christian disciples.

In such circumstances, a single unworthy church-member can do more to discredit Christianity and destroy a church's influence than a score of good men can do to support them. A church which pays no heed to the moral laxity of its members, which fails in the exercise of proper discipline, which does not seek in the spirit of love to restore the derelict, might as well close its doors.

On the other hand, where moral earnestness prevails in a body of professing Christians, when they are so evidently working together in the fear of the Lord that no one can fail to see it, when they are actively engaged in the Lord's service, they form a power in the community which is constantly recognized. As the hands on the dial-plate of the town clock mark the time for all its inhabitants, so the church in its collective life as the conscience of the community regulates the conduct of all its members. Such a church is strong, whether few in numbers or many, strong because it stands for the right. Every believer is a "living epistle, known and read of all men." The church and the cause which it represents command the respect and often receive the help even of worldly men.

We see, therefore, that one of the requisites for a truly prosperous church is a careful, conscientious and godly walk on the part of all its members.

3. A third element of strength and success in a church is its prevailing, dominating Christian spirit. As truly as a person, a church has an individuality of its own. A marked earnestness may characterize it, or a spiritual deadness. It may be exceptionally warm and social, or it may freeze people out by the chilliness of its atmosphere. It may be aristocratic and exclusive, or it may be a church of the people. It may be noted for its generosity or for its stinginess; for its missionary zeal or for its moral reform work; for its evangelistic spirit, or for aggressiveness in general. This pervading spirit is discerned at once as one comes in contact with its people or

attends its services. The church itself may not realize the full extent of this spirit, but it is a real factor in its life and influence, for the spirit of the church is stamped more or less upon its entire membership.

Into this spirit, or atmosphere, various elements have entered. History, traditions, precedents, have had much to do with it, form the basis of it. The personality of the pastor and of those who are its recognized leaders is a large factor in it. Something from the life and character of each of its members enters into it. Each one of them contributes something. All these elements combined help to make up the distinctive life, spirit, atmosphere or individuality of a church, just as the waters of many tributaries, large and small, form the great volume and the powerful current of a mighty river.

It is this aggregate or dominating spirit of a church which has so much to do with determining its success or failure. And when we reflect upon its potency; how it pervades and controls everything within a church; how young people, especially, unconsciously imbibe it; how it determines the quality of its Christian manhood and womanhood and the type of its Christian influence; when we think of its effect upon the activities of a church and upon the character and extent of its activities, we begin to realize, in a measure, the importance of endeavoring to bring that spirit as nearly as possible into harmony with the spirit of Christ.

Some aspects or characteristics of this much-needed spirit may be pointed out:

(1) A spirit of Christian fellowship, of Christian love, of Christian unity, is indispensable. The church is a home, and the family spirit should prevail in it—a glad consciousness among its members of a close family tie. They are brethren and sisters in Christ, and there should be a disposition of mutual helpfulness among them and a cordial regard toward all who join their number. In such an atmosphere there will be willing tolerance of personal

peculiarities, large charity with reference to weakness and infirmities, a readiness to bear one another's burdens, to rejoice unselfishly with those who rejoice, and to weep sympathetically with those who weep. Christian love will abound. Each one will be tenderly considerate of others. The spirit of thoughtless criticism, which is the bane of so many churches, will be unknown.

It was a beautiful tribute which a pastor, in speaking to another, paid to his church. He had been with it only a few months, but long enough to enable him to learn its spirit. Said he, "I have never yet heard one person in my church speak unkindly of another." Love and respect abounded. Such a thing as strife and faction seemed to be unknown. Naturally, in such circumstances, there was oneness of aim and purpose, so that, notwithstanding individual differences of opinion on minor matters, there were the peace and serenity which are found in the deep sea far below the strife and turmoil of its surface. This unity of spirit is one of the vital conditions of a truly strong and prosperous church. In this union there is strength. Without it, with a discordant, inharmonious spirit prevailing, the family and fraternal sentiment absent, with bitterness and alienation and jealousies among the members of a church, with factions pulling in different directions, success is out of the question. Aggressive work is hindered if not stopped altogether. People are repelled instead of attracted. Few, if any, souls are gathered into the kingdom.

On the coast of Scotland, the beloved Arnot once saw a man walking out into the water carrying a basket in one arm and having a small staff in his hand. The man would now and then thrust the end of the stick down to the bottom, then draw it up again, take something from the end of it, put it in the basket, and so walk on, repeating the process. Arnot approached him and asked what he was doing. Said he, "I am fishing for pearls." "How do you do it?" was the next question. The man

replied, "I move along in the water, and wherever I see an open shell lying on the bottom, I thrust my stick into it, and the shell closes upon it, and I take it up. But there is this remarkable thing about this kind of fishing: we cannot catch a single pearl while there is even a ripple on the surface of the water." The incident impresses its own lesson.

(2) There will be a large element of aggressiveness in the spirit which characterizes the truly prosperous church. Aggressiveness along moral and spiritual lines is one of the fundamental aims of a church, notably with reference to bringing men into the kingdom.

Yet, in some churches this spirit is entirely lacking. There seems to be no idea that a church has any specific mission to accomplish further than to provide for Sunday services, and from time to time to make needed repairs about the house in which they are held. As a natural consequence, the church seldom or never makes definite plans or puts forth definite efforts to accomplish positive religious results, while it is rarely, if ever, that any one is converted and unites with it.

Recognizing its mission to reach out beyond itself, and to minister to others, a church, to be most effective in its activities, should be thoroughly organized, as men organize for greater effectiveness in other relations and spheres. Provision should be made to give every member of it something to do. There should be a place and a duty for each one in the scheme of the church's activities.

Furthermore, there should be as much of the practical business method as may be needful in carrying out the ends of a church. The most competent men should be sought out to fill positions of responsibility, instead of the least competent, as is so often the case. The church has no right to tolerate mere figureheads. The house of worship should be made attractive, as merchants seek to render their places of business attractive, while every

courtesy should be shown to strangers who drop in to the services. Common sense ought not to be left behind when it comes to the realm of religious service.

A spirit of aggressiveness will also lead a church to be alive and on the alert with reference to any special needs or demands of the times, or of its locality. It will be progressive as well as aggressive. It will be prompt to adjust itself to such exigencies as may arise, and to take advantage of providential opportunities. When important moral questions are up, and for the time being are prominent, a live church will seek to mold the sentiment of the people aright in regard to them. It need not ally itself with any political party or with any special organization, which is always a hazardous thing to do, but it should speak out in no uncertain tones and inculcate such views and such a spirit in its members that they can be trusted to act intelligently and conscientiously in the discharge of their civic responsibilities. It can speak out upon the Sabbath question, and it should do so often, for if the American Sabbath, with all that it implies, is to be maintained it is the duty of the churches to make their influence felt in the most positive and pronounced manner. Nor should it be silent upon the temperance question. There may be differences of judgment as to methods to be employed, but there need be none as to the fundamental principles involved. The church can help create a righteous sentiment out of which just laws will be made. It can speak out, as occasion demands, against civic, or state, or national corruption. It is not the business of the church to be active in politics as such, but it should strive to make good citizens. It is not its function to instruct a man how to vote, but it should so indoctrinate him with right principles that he can be trusted to vote intelligently and conscientiously. Crowning all, this aggressiveness will manifest itself in an earnest evangelistic spirit, which will prompt constant effort to bring men into right relations with God. Other

lines of effort are important, this is all-important. Other things ought to be done, this is never to be left undone. This is the highest and most important realm of Christian service. This service is to be rendered largely through personal influence exerted in connection with the varied agencies of the church. Every member, as well as the pastor, ought to be an evangelist, with a growing sense of responsibility for the conversion of men. From time to time the necessities of the situation may call for the suspension of other lines of activity, and the bending of all energies for the gathering in of the ripened and waiting harvest. No church can be said to be fulfilling its proper functions which is not pervaded by an evangelistic spirit, or which fails to put forth definite efforts for the salvation of men.

When a church is pervaded by this aggressive spirit, equipped and ready for active effort in all these directions, it is prepared to become, it will become, a mighty power for good in any community. It stands for something, and it will accomplish something. Communion after communion does not pass without accessions to its membership. A church, though small in numbers, with the right spirit will exert an influence which will everywhere be recognized and felt.

How very different the state of things in a large, strong church—strong according to worldly standards—in a city which I once visited! Inquiry was made of friends who were members of it as to what the church was doing. "Oh, nothing in particular," was the reply; "we need a general stirring up." "Are you obliged to have entertainments of various kinds to help support the church?" "No, our expenses are all met by pew-rents. We have no difficulty in raising all the money that is necessary. Our people generally are pretty well off." "Is anything being done for the needy of the community? Are there any systematic plans to this end?" "No." "Well, are you doing anything for the needy elsewhere—

for the freedmen, home-missionary families, for plague or famine-stricken peoples? Are you raising money or filling any boxes with clothing, or food, or other necessities, to be sent to them?" "No; except that once in a while we hold a ladies' missionary meeting." "Are you supporting any Sunday-school, or mission, aside from your own school?" "No." "Do you have any accessions to your membership?" "Rarely, now, unless some one moves into the neighborhood and joins the church by letter." "How is the prayer-meeting?" "Very few attend it. It is not very interesting." "Are you doing anything, as a church, aside from carrying on the routine of the church services?" "Well, not much, I guess. The truth is, we need a general stirring up." Unquestionably, this was the fact. The difficulty was, there was no aggressive, working spirit in that wealthy church, and too many others are in the same apathetic condition. They have a name that they live, but they are spiritually dead.

Does any one ask how this active, aggressive spirit is to be cultivated or developed? The example of the pastor and of a few earnest members cooperating with him will go far to promote it. Enthusiasm on the part of any one is apt to be contagious. But the one thing needed above all else is more of the Holy Spirit breathed into the hearts of the church-members, more prayer for the presence of the Spirit, that all may be girded, energized, impelled, to engage in earnest effort, and that all the church machinery may be set in motion. Without prayer, efficiency and success in church life and work are impossible. Prayer is the vital breath of a church, as it is of the individual Christian. If this ceases, its spiritual life ceases, its activities are interrupted. The early Church was a Church of prayer. After Christ departed, it met and prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and it continued to do so until the blessing came. Then all were energized for effective service. The Church today can learn a practical lesson from this. There is need

of the same quickening, energizing presence of the Spirit of God, and this Spirit is as available now as it was then. The praying church is the live church. It is aggressive, too, and especially in the work of saving men.

(3) Another phase of the spirit which pervades and animates a truly prosperous church, is a missionary interest. The sympathies of a church should be as large and broad as the sympathies of Christ. There was nothing narrow or contracted about him or his thought. His sympathies included all classes, all conditions, all races of men, the whole world, while in his plans for the kingdom provision was made for its universal proclamation. There is something sublime in such a conception as this, and a Christian church should be just as broad in its sympathies as was its Founder. A church has no more right to exist for itself solely, or for its own local constituency, than a Christian man has to live to himself alone. There are other interests than its own, which are dear to Christ's heart; there are other fields than its own, which must be remembered in their needs; there are whole continents, almost, which are destitute of the gospel, and if Christ's people do not make provision for them, who will? The Church is responsible for the world's evangelization. Christ's command is binding upon his people still. A church's first duty is to provide for its own, but, after that, there can be no escaping responsibility for the world at large. The surest way to destroy the spiritual life of any church is to ignore the world's needs. The present is a missionary era, and no church is up with the times or doing its duty, which does not recognize this fact and cheerfully do all in its power to promote a cause which is dear to Christ's heart. A true missionary spirit ought to be characteristic of every church.

(4) One other aspect of the spirit which is essential to render a church in the largest measure effective for carrying out its mission may be noted. It is called by

the French *esprit de corps*. This is not merely a narrow, denominational zeal; it is a spirit of loyal devotion to one's church, because it is the church of one's choice, the organization in connection with which one chiefly labors to promote the kingdom of God. This spirit is somewhat akin to a patriot's love for his country. The life of its possessor is in his church. He aims to be present at all its meetings. A little dew on the ground, or a slight moisture in the air, or a tiny cloud in the heavens, is not sufficient to keep him away. He is deeply interested in whatever relates to its welfare, is jealous for its good name, is enthusiastic in its support. He stands by it through thick and thin.

When such a spirit prevails within a church—and this spirit can be cultivated—it becomes, under God, a most powerful factor in promoting his cause. If money is to be raised, it is not a question how much Mr. — is going to give, but, How much can I personally afford to contribute? If any special work is to be done, this spirit leads to an enthusiastic effort on the part of all to do it, and to do it well for Christ's sake.

It was once my privilege to preach for a Sunday to just such a church. It was small, and its house of worship was not large. It was a rainy day, and the rain poured down in torrents at just the hour for people to leave their homes for the morning service. Of course, thought I, there will be but a handful out, possibly a score, perhaps not more than a dozen. But what were my astonishment and delight when the time for opening the service arrived to find the house full, scarcely a seat being vacant. My spirits rose at once. The people were closely attentive. All entered into the responsive reading and the singing with a vim, as if they heartily relished it. None of them seemed concerned about the time; no one turned around to look at the clock; not a single watch came out. They seemed to be as much interested as if they were not listening to a sermon, but a lecture, at fifty cents admission,

or to a magnificent oratorio, like "Creation," or "St. Paul." It was an inspiration to stand before such a congregation. At the close of the service I inquired what it meant—such a congregation, on such a morning, and all so interested. "Oh," they said, "that's the way our people always do. A little rain (it was pouring) makes no difference. They love the church, and they enter into all the church work in just this way."

"How about the prayer-meeting?" I next inquired. "We have most excellent prayer-meetings; nearly all the church people are on hand and enter into the service as if they thoroughly enjoyed it. It is a kind of family gathering." I attended the Sunday-school. The little church was full again, although it was raining still. I asked if this was about the average attendance. "Oh," said the superintendent, "our people seem really to love the Sunday-School; always turn out, old and young alike, rain or shine. I have a splendid corps of teachers, rarely an absence, and they exercise a kind of pastoral care over their classes, visiting the members at their homes. If one is absent from a class for a Sunday, the teacher soon finds out the reason."

It was still raining at the hour of the evening service. Surely, thought I, only a handful will be out to-night, especially after such a turnout this morning and at Sunday-school. As I reached the church rather early, I found a large and rousing Endeavor meeting in progress. There was no hesitation, no delay. Each member seemed to be doing his duty. At the close of the meeting, all went at once into the main audience-room instead of going home or elsewhere, as is so often the case, and the house was soon as full as in the morning. It was a most enjoyable service—the entire day had been so—and as, at the close, the people crowded around to speak to me, stranger though I was, I could not refrain from expressing my delight at the spirit which seemed to pervade the

church, the *esprit de corps* which was so apparent. They loved their church, were deeply interested in its success, all of them, old and young, and were enthusiastic in regard to everything pertaining to it and its welfare—all because of their love for Christ and for each other. Ever since, the thought of that rousing little church, with its hopeful, cheerful, loyal spirit, has been an inspiration.

We have now gone over the ground proposed, having spoken of what a church is for, and of a number of the elements which are essential to its prosperity; having pointed out what would seem to be the ideal of a successful church. A church is an organization composed of believers in Christ. Its aim is to build up its members in faith and love, and to develop the graces of the Christian character; to multiply its numbers by winning others to discipleship; to make its influence felt in the community where it exists for righteousness and truth, and for the betterment of society the world over. In order to realize this aim, it is important, first, that it be firmly rooted and grounded in the "faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints," in the truth as it is in Christ, and as set forth in his Word; second, that the character of its members, by which the world judges the Christian religion and the Christian Church, be upright and moral, and in harmony with the spirit and character of Christ; thirdly, that the spirit which pervades it be full of sweetness and love, mutual sympathy, aggressive, evangelistic, missionary, with an *esprit de corps* which is enthusiastic, loyal. A church which possesses these characteristics and depends upon the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and inspiration, cannot fail to be strong and to prosper. It will, in the highest degree, be successful. To it, as was the case with churches in the first century, there will be added daily of such as are being saved.

## XII

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE KIND OF PREACHING NEEDED IN OUR AGE

It is related that in the cabin of one of the earliest steamers to cross the Atlantic hung a painting representing Columbus' first sight of the new world. About him, on the deck of the vessel, lay a group of sailors asleep. The grandest event of modern history signified nothing to them. In the stillness of the night stood the great explorer, his hand above his forehead, his whole soul shining in his eyes. He had caught sight of a light moving about on the far-off shore, and toward that his thoughts were all flying forward. No wonder that he was profoundly moved, in view of a discovery of such vast significance, and of his own responsibility in connection with it.

So the vision of Paul, penetrating farther than that of the indifferent ones about him, gained a glimpse of the glories of an eternal world, while the possibility of heirship to its blessedness, through faith in Christ, dawned upon him with all the freshness and force of a marvelous discovery. Grasping, as he did, the mighty import of the cross, it was to him the most stupendous fact of human history, so that his whole being, thrilled with the thought, was fired with a consuming passion to make the great discovery known everywhere.

It was this which prompted the memorable utterance in his letter to the Christians at Corinth: "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Here at Corinth he had previously founded a flourishing church. Distressing intelligence had now reached him of its sad decline

in spirituality. The influence of the surrounding worldliness had gradually pervaded it. Serious divisions had arisen. Evil practices were unrebuked, while the public services had largely degenerated into mere occasions for literary entertainment and esthetic culture. The simple gospel which Paul had preached, and which had been demonstrated to be the power of God unto salvation, had been thrust into the background. Human wisdom and speculation, utterly devoid of moral energy, had been allowed to supersede it. The prevailing sentiment in the church demanded this type of preaching. Paul's heart was deeply grieved, and in his letter he probes the difficulty to the core, faithfully applies the principles of the gospel as the only remedy, and powerfully exhorts the Corinthians to return to their former loyalty to Christ. Only thus could they be rescued from their spiritual peril. So strong, indeed, was his conviction of the gospel's transforming power, so grand his conception of the results it would ultimately achieve in the world, and of such transcendent importance did he esteem it that man should know of it and be persuaded to receive it, that he had been led while among them, as everywhere, deliberately to determine not to know anything, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. Doing this, he felt that he was consecrating his powers to the loftiest ends, and history ever since has been vindicating his conviction.

The low spiritual state of the church at Corinth finds its counterpart in the condition of many of our churches to-day. Wordliness has invaded them. Piety is at a low ebb. Divisions are not uncommon. Activity is but feebly developed. Revivals are rare, conversions few, and spiritual dearth prevails to an alarming degree. This low spiritual condition is due, in great part, to misconceptions as to the nature and obligations of the ministry. A false standard of preaching is set up, unreasonable demands are made upon the pulpit, to say nothing of the temptation which is placed before the preacher to seek to win favor by catering to these requirements.

In this popular though unspiritual demand, the importance of mere literary, intellectual, esthetic, rhetorical and social qualities in the preacher is unduly exaggerated, to the minifying of the "weightier matters of the law," or to the exclusion of them altogether. Yet, while it is of advantage that the preacher have an attractive personality, that he be as faultless as possible in manner both in public and in private, that there be no lack in rhetorical skill or oratorical ability, these qualities, after all, are not the main qualification for the preacher's office. Valuable and desirable as they are, they are of but secondary and subordinate importance. A preacher may possess all of these qualities, and yet lack spiritual vitality and power. He may be without any clear grasp of the true function of the pulpit, or the nature of the gospel message. He may be lacking even in character.

Many think that the preacher's message should not be of a character to wound the sensitiveness of any, especially of prominent hearers; that it should not dwell too pointedly upon sin and wrong-doing, but deal with topics of the day, political, scientific, literary, with just enough reference to the Bible and the things of the Bible to preserve the ecclesiastical standing of the church, and to retain the sympathy of the truly religious element in it.

The erroneous notion also prevails that power and ability in the pulpit are measured by the amount of salary a preacher can command; that the true test of one's success and of being "the man for the place," is ability to "draw," and that such ability covers a multitude of deficiencies in other directions. Too often, instead of standing uncompromisingly for the truth as it is in Christ, preachers, under pressure of these false standards and requirements, are led gradually, perhaps unconsciously, to conform to them, the result of which is to lower the spiritual tone of the people still more, and to deprive them of that which they most sorely need, and which the pulpit was designed to furnish. The radical difficulty

in all such cases is lack of spirituality on the part of the people, a lack for which the preacher may not be entirely blameless.

What is the remedy for such a state of things? In view of the fact that among the various agencies for molding the thought and life of the church the pulpit stands preeminent, one of the first things needed for the correction of this low spiritual condition, with its unspiritual demands and its indifference to spiritual things, is a new spirituality and power in the pulpit, a fresh spiritual baptism on the part of those who are called to deliver the gospel message, so that, like Peter and the apostles before the Sanhedrin, they may be able to say, when clamorous demands are made upon them by worldly-minded people, "We must obey God rather than men."

This leads us to inquire as to some of the things in particular which are needed in the preaching of the times, and which require special emphasis, to render it in the highest degree effective. In attempting to answer the question, no general and indiscriminate disparagement of the preaching of the times is intended. Far from it. There is a vast deal of faithful preaching by consecrated servants of God, which is either accomplishing large immediate results, or is sowing seed for future harvesting. Yet with all that is excellent, there is still room for improvement in not a little of it.

1. First and foremost, the great need in the preaching of these, as of all times, is that it should be clearly, unequivocally, the preaching of the gospel, that Christ and he crucified be made central and paramount. This was the one all-absorbing theme of apostolic preaching, the proclamation of which, with the wondrous singleness of aim which characterized it, was everywhere attended by manifestations of God's presence and power. Men were rescued by it from their thralldom to sin. They were gradually made over into the likeness of Christ. To accomplish this was the supreme end for which the

apostles were commissioned and anointed, and to do that same thing is the supreme business of their spiritual successors.

They have not always seemed to make it so, however, as a matter of fact. Not always have their teachings kept closely to the one, central, living theme. Christ, in his appropriate character and work, has by many been lost sight of, even in pulpits still bearing the evangelical name. The great and fundamental doctrines gathering about and centering in Christ's person, the doctrines which constitute the framework of all true gospel preaching, are rarely touched upon, or are kept entirely in the background. For the verities of the gospel are substituted human traditions and vague speculations, having no possible relation to the great work of saving lost men, and building them up in the Christian life and faith. A thousand questions about Christ are discussed, but Christ himself is not presented. Christianity is glorified as a system and in its achievements, but Christ himself is not made to stand forth as the personal, present Saviour whom men need. He is concealed rather than disclosed. Almost everything and everybody are pushed to the front, save Jesus Christ, when he is the one person most of all needed, and his gospel is the only thing adequate to the work to be effected. In such circumstances, is it any wonder that churches go into spiritual decline, that results of preaching are meager, that revivals rarely or never occur, that the kingdom of God is not more rapidly advanced? Is it asked what it is, what it involves, to preach Christ? That is something not easy to define. We may call to our assistance, however, one whose words will quite likely be readily accepted, and whose pulpit ministrations afforded a constant illustration of his definition. "To preach Christ," says the late Dr. William M. Taylor, of New York, in his Yale Lectures on Preaching, "involves all that is necessary to secure the twofold end of the conversion of sinners and their growth in character after-

wards, warning against existing temptation, inciting to higher holiness, and stimulating to the performance of works of faith and labors of love. It is not going aside from the preacher's proper work as an ambassador of Christ to expose some social evil and unfold the remedy by which alone it can be removed. Paul did not mean to say that every time he opened his lips he would tell over again the story of the cross, but rather that, as a means of saving men, he would set nothing else before them than Christ and him crucified. The gospel as he preached it was far-reaching enough in its application to touch the conduct and experience of men at every point. The cross, as he used it, was an instrument of the widest range and the greatest power.

"When, therefore," he continues, "I insist that you, like him, should 'preach Jesus Christ and him crucified,' I do not mean to make the pulpit for you a battery of such a nature that the guns upon it can strike only such vessels as happen to pass immediately in front of its embrasures. On the contrary, I turn it for you into a tower, whereon is mounted a swivel-cannon, which can sweep the whole horizon of human life and strike down all immorality and ungodliness and selfishness and sin. I do not shut you into a small chamber having but one outlook, and even that into a narrow court; but I place you in an observatory, with a revolving telescope that can command the landscape round and round, and sweep, besides, the hemisphere of the stars. I do not mean that you should keep continually repeating the words of 'the faithful saying,' like a parrot cry, until every particle of meaning has dropped out of them, but rather that you should make application of the great principles that lie beneath the cross to the ever-varying circumstances and occurrences of life, and that in such a way as at once to succor the Christian, and arrest and convert the sinner. I do not mean that you should disdain the aids of literature, or refuse to use such illustrations as science may supply, but

rather that, while employing all these, you should make them always subservient to this central theme, and ever turn their light upon the Master's face. I do not mean that you should decline to venture with your hearers for a voyage over the ocean of truth, but rather that, while sailing forth, you should be careful still to have your first parallel of longitude passing through Calvary, that so you may judge of all things else by their relation to the cross, and that, ever as you have opportunity, you should beseech sinners to be reconciled to God."

Such a definition as this is certainly broad enough for any one consecrated to the high ends of the Christian ministry, affording ample scope for any sanctified ambition, at the same time precluding nothing of freshness, variety, timeliness, in his public ministration.

But is not this a progressive age, are not the times peculiar, and are not certain modifications of the subject-matter of preaching needed, that the pulpit may keep abreast of advancing civilization and progressive culture of the times? This is a progressive age, and we glory in its civilization and in everything which in it is really promotive of man's highest interests. But some things remain unchanged. Human nature is still the same. The natural heart is the same corrupt, sinful thing which it has ever been. It is still enmity against God. In the olden time, the masses of men were dead in trespasses and sins. All had sinned and come short of the glory of God. In the present time men are no whit different in this respect. All the ills and woes of society now, as always, are but the external manifestations of the one underlying disease of sin. These symptoms can be removed only as sin is eradicated from the human heart. Neither education, culture, civilization, nor anything else of human origin has ever been able to do this. The only remedy is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was demonstrated to be the power of God unto salvation in Paul's time, and it is the only effective remedy to-day. Hence

there is need of the same old gospel, the same unchanging Christ to-day as of old. There is no change in this respect. There may be improved methods of presenting this gospel, improved forms of statement, the old faith may be set in new lights, but the gospel itself, of Jesus Christ and him crucified, has not changed, will not change, nor has the need of it passed by or lessened in a single degree. If Paul were to appear among men to-day, he would declare the same gospel that he did eighteen hundred years ago. He might alter his style of address to adapt it to changed circumstances, but he would not alter the substance of his message. He would find a different civilization, but he would also find the same corrupt human nature, needing the same gospel remedy for its redemption.

The gospel of Christ is the only adequate agency ever made known for human salvation. Consciously or unconsciously, men are everywhere hungering for it, and this far more than we are wont to realize. There are many everywhere the language of whose hearts is, "Sir, we would see Jesus," and too often they are not permitted to see him. There is profound truth in what some one has said, that if Christ were really held up to men in all his moral beauty, his tender love, his power to save, as he is actually represented in the Word of God, multitudes would be attracted to him who are now repelled by the caricatures they behold. How many Christians even, burdened, weighed down with sore trial, and longing for a view of the Christ they love, go to the sanctuary only to be disappointed? Instead of the bread they crave, they are presented with a philosophical disquisition in regard to its nature; instead of the healing balm, an essay upon its aromatic qualities. Of the preaching of too many the fatal criticism would be none too severe; "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

While the preaching of some other gospel—literary,

esthetic, scientific, which is yet not a gospel—may gather and hold the masses for a time, only the preaching of Christ and him crucified has power to save. The truth as it is in Christ is the only truth that converts and sanctifies, while the faithful presentation of this simple gospel in plain, every-day language, freed from the technicalities of the schools, amazingly clarifies the whole subject of theology and of practical religion to bewildered multitudes who are waiting to be rescued and saved.

2. But not only is there need of a more faithful presentation of the simple gospel of Christ and him crucified; a second need in the preaching of the times is that it be more distinctively Biblical. More Bible is one of the great needs of to-day.

The Scriptures testify of Christ. The Old Testament points to him constantly through prophecy and symbol; the New Testament sets him forth as he actually appeared in the flesh. He is the central figure from beginning to end, while so inseparably connected are the written and the incarnate Word that Christ is most effectually presented when the Scriptures are most faithfully unfolded.

And when we speak of the Scriptures, we mean the Scriptures entire, the Old and the New. There is a tendency with some to disparage the former, to regard it, or some portions of it, as obsolete or becoming so. It is a noticeable and significant fact, however, that there is least of this tendency where scholarship is most spiritual and profound. Neither Testament can be fully appreciated or understood without the other, for it is still true, as Augustine said centuries ago, that "the New Testament is enfolded in the Old, and the Old Testament is unfolded in the New." The words of the Old Testament were constantly in Christ's mouth; to them he constantly appealed. This was the armory whence he drew the weapons with which to parry the subtle assaults of the tempter. From the same source Peter drew material for his Pentecostal sermon, Stephen for his mag-

nificent defence, Paul for his matchless arguments. While Christ was the one transcendent theme of the apostles' preaching, it was still a constant characteristic of them that they "reasoned from the scriptures." It was this which gave their preaching such authority and power. In such circumstances, does not this disposition to disparage the Old Testament Scriptures savor slightly, to say the least, of presumption?

No feature of the preaching of the successful evangelists of the world has been more prominent than this, its thoroughly Biblical character; and that preaching to-day which is most squarely based upon the Bible and which most faithfully unfolds and enforces the Word, other things being equal, will most effectively present Christ, and do the largest execution.

How different, how weak, in comparison, how shorn of spiritual power, is that preaching which is made up of speculations which have no solid foundation in the Word of God, and which has no relation whatever to actual life and its needs; which seems more intent upon displaying the intellectual and literary accomplishments of the preacher than in holding up Christ for the acceptance of dying men; which is apparently more concerned to devise some new and easier method of salvation, less humiliating to human pride, than to make known the one and only way disclosed in the Scriptures; which seems to delight in slaying scientific or other giants, harmless if let alone, or in battering down crude forms of belief of generations ago, which trouble very few people now, or in parading the preacher's looseness of views, or in straining obscure passages into the support of some favorite but clearly unbiblical theory, rather than in ringing out the great, positive, fundamental doctrines of Scripture, which are essential to salvation, and in trying to persuade men to turn from their evil ways and live!

Such preaching does not—how can it?—take hold upon

the conscience. It does not, it cannot, save from sin and build men up in righteous character. For the accomplishment of these ends, no substitute for the preaching of the Word has ever been found. It is something which commends itself to the inmost spirit of the listener, even though it may clash with his actual life. It is divinely adapted to his profoundest wants, and is the natural food for the spiritual life. If, therefore, the faith of Christian people is to be strong and vigorous, and Christian living is to be pure and holy, abounding in the fruits of the Spirit, the truth as it is in Christ, and as it is set forth in his Word, must nourish and sustain them.

Said a Christian man recently, a scholar whose experience and standing give weight to his words: "The leading defect of the modern sermon is that it fails to unfold the Scriptures and enforce its truths for the salvation and sanctification of souls." Said another, "I wish you ministers would give us more Bible in your preaching, more of it, not necessarily in the old form of verse by verse exposition, although more of that might be helpful, but still following out in some large way the expository idea, something as Drs. Taylor, Hall and Meredith, of New York City, have done so successfully, and thus bring our minds into direct contact with larger consecutive portions of the quickening, nourishing Word." These are very suggestive remarks, the one vitally but perhaps not too severely critical, the other voicing a want felt by many, and hinting at a practical method of meeting it.

What is wanted on our part is more of the spirit and purpose of Dr. Todd, who, in accepting his call to the first church under his care wrote: "In my preaching I shall keep closely to the Word of God, and by this I would have you test my instructions." This ought to be recognized as the true test of preaching to-day. The truly consecrated preacher can ask no broader foundation on which to stand than that which has been laid by "apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone."

It is said that after certain excavations and the clearing away of the rubbish of ages at Pompeii, a spring of pure water, which had been choked for centuries, began to flow again. In the Middle Ages, because the Word of God had been buried out of sight under the mass of scholastic and monkish rubbish, the spiritual life of the Church was well-nigh crushed out. The gospel stream flowing from it had been completely choked. The Reformation of Luther was a return to the purity of the Word through a vigorous clearing away of this ecclesiastical rubbish. Then the spiritual life of Christendom began to revive. There is danger that this gospel stream, flowing from the Word of God, be again choked, and the thirsty earth deprived of its refreshing waters in this age of worldly conformity, of a subtly pervasive, rationalistic spirit, of new departures and bold speculations. It is our mission to see that the course of this gospel stream be kept clear, its waters wholesome and pure, by thrusting aside all the rubbish of those obstructing and stagnating influences which would hinder its progress or neutralize its healing properties. There is crying need in many pulpits to-day of a "new departure," a return to the simple gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified, preached according to the Scriptures.

Then, too, when preaching becomes more Biblical, the Word entering more fully into the warp and woof of it, or in proportion as it is so, the fundamental facts and doctrines of the Word of God will be made to stand out in bolder relief, and to maintain their relative prominence somewhat as they do there. Then the awful, sad fact of sin, upon which the need of the gospel for any one is based, will not be slurred over, or presented, as too often now, in a faint and timid undertone. Whether men like or dislike to hear it, the mighty fact of the atonement, by which salvation is made possible, will not be kept in the background. The necessity of repentance will be emphasized as its great importance demands, and this, too,

without hint or suggestion of any possible probation beyond this life. These doctrines, with constant emphasis upon righteousness in daily living as the true test of Christian character, will be made to appear as the vitally essential truths which they really are.

Paul exhorted Timothy to "preach the word." The same exhortation comes ringing down the centuries to the Christian ministry to-day. Preach the Word, preach it faithfully, the Old Testament and the New, for thus will the crucified Christ be preached in the most effective way.

3. A third need in much of the preaching of the times is more positiveness. The times require not only more of Christ and him crucified, presented in a more Biblical way, but that the preacher be more positive and pronounced in his utterances. The fundamental idea of preaching, indeed, is declaring, declaring something definite, heralding a very positive message, given on the authority of God, as, for instance, when he said to Jonah: "Go unto Nineveh . . . and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." So the apostles understood their commission from Christ, and so they proclaimed their message. There was nothing indefinite about it, it gave forth no uncertain sound. There is no lack of positiveness or clear ringing certainty in Paul's words when he said: "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified," or in any other of his recorded utterances on the theme which filled his soul. We know the results of such preaching. Converts, in like manner positive and pronounced, were multiplied; believers were confirmed in the faith; churches were established, and the kingdom of Christ was everywhere advanced. If there was wavering or lapsing afterward on the part of any, it was due to other influences than the apostolic preaching.

How marked the contrast in much of the preaching of to-day! The notion of many seems to be that vague-

ness is a prime excellence in a sermon. They are always dealing with the indefinite, speculating about the things that are not known, rather than setting forth the positive things which it is their mission to declare. As a distinguished divine has said: "The sermons of many preachers have degenerated into soft, mollusious and plastic things which may be squeezed by the hearer into any shape, or turned by him in any direction." There is little of the apostolic ring in what is said. Said a devoted Christian man of his pastor: "I never heard him make a positive assertion in regard to vital religious truth, or, if he did, he qualified it in such a way, before he was through, that it really amounted to nothing." Unfortunately, not a little modern preaching is open to similar criticism. There is no grip to it. Proceeding from no profound conviction, it makes no profound impression. There seems to be nothing really settled or certain in it. It does not move men to action. It is an utter failure in so far as the true ends of the pulpit are concerned.

The results of such preaching are painful to contemplate. The people catch the spirit of the preacher's uncertainty, his speculations become their dogmas, his doubts, expressed or only suggested, develop doubts in their minds. Their faith is undetermined, spiritual life stagnates, and unless there be sufficient spiritual vitality in the members of the church to resist the baneful influence, it becomes dead, dead, dead.

The causes of all this are various. Some have failed to perceive the true function of the pulpit, which is to declare the positive gospel of Christ and him crucified, rather than mere human speculations or secular lore, or a mass of uninspiring negations. The difficulty with others is the radical one of a lack of real conviction in regard to the things of Christ and his Word. They are not fully persuaded in their own minds. The Word of God is not really authoritative to them, the teachings of

Christ are not absolutely final. Their creeds abound in interrogation-points, or are made up mainly of negations, the things they do not believe rather than the things they positively hold; or if they have any positive convictions, there is lack of courage to make them known, a shrinking from collision with the subtle, skeptical spirit of the times, or a fear that somebody may be offended if they speak out. Or they yield to a popular clamor for a modified, diluted, easy-going gospel, temporizing and shifting according to the popular breeze, until ultimately, very likely, they lose, as they deserve to lose, the respect of the very persons they seek to please or are so careful not to offend.

What is needed is first of all a more profound conviction in regard to revealed truth and the things of Christ, and then courage to make it known. No minister can properly do his work unless thoroughly possessed of and pervaded by the truths he is set to declare. If his mind waver, for instance, as to the absolute necessity of the gospel for salvation; if he is not clear that men without it are in imminent peril; if he is undecided as to whether the present life is the only period of probation, it will be impossible for him to preach with real effectiveness or to lead men to ask what they must do to be saved. The preachers who have made their influence most felt for Christ, who have done most toward building up the Redeemer's kingdom in their day and generation, have always been men of pronounced conviction as to the certainty of the things given them to declare, and these things they have declared with all their might. The prophets were well-nigh terrible in their absorbing conviction of the majesty and truth of their message. The apostles thoroughly believed what they proclaimed. They bore witness to the things they knew. What would Luther and Knox and other reformers, and such men as the Wesleys, Nettleton, Finney, Moody of our time, and a host of others, have accomplished without this profound conviction, and without the positiveness of

utterance and action naturally growing out of it? Their energy, heroism and success were the natural outgrowth of their positive faith. Their creeds were positive creeds, and their earnestness was contagious. The fact is, the Christian pulpit has no business to be otherwise than positive. It is no place for negations and obscurations. Its mission is to declare "the everlasting Yea." No conviction in regard to these things means no power, for no one can communicate profound impulse to other souls unless his own be first filled with it. What is wanted is more of the Pauline "we know," "we also believe, and therefore also we speak;" more positive apprehension of the Lord Jesus Christ in the preacher's own experience; a faith which really grasps him; a thorough conviction that the gospel is the power of God, and the only power, unto salvation; that "neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved;" a burning desire to proclaim the gospel for the salvation of men and for their upbuilding in the faith. Then something in the way of positive results will be accomplished. A noted servant of God was once asked by a young preacher what he should do when he came before his people. "Do?" replied the leader of a hundred revivals, "Do? Make the sparks fly." The man of conviction will make himself felt wherever he is. Nor will he be likely to wander very far from the true mission of the pulpit when once he gets into it. He will not feel burdened to instruct the people in all the latest phases of scientific development, or theological vagaries as to how men may possibly escape if they neglect so great salvation in this life, or anything of that sort. No! his one absorbing aim, underlying and overreaching all things else, will be to preach the positive, everlasting truth.

Such preaching as this, positive, pronounced, in regard to things positively and unmistakably declared, would impart new power to many a pulpit. It would revive the

spiritual life of many a languishing congregation, it would most effectively meet existing evils, and do more to clear the atmosphere of the subtle, skeptical malaria which pervades it, than any other means that might be employed. Not many years ago, a young preacher began work in a community which had been almost literally honeycombed with infidel teachings. One day a leading infidel accosted him on the street and sought to draw him into an argument about the Scriptures. Said the young preacher: "Mr. —, I did not come into this community to defend the Word of God, I came to declare it. It is its own best defence." And the more skeptical criticism he heard, the more earnestly and emphatically he laid down the positive truths of the gospel. A powerful revival soon sprang up, and among the large numbers converted, not a few of the infidels were included. Lyman Beecher once went into a community where he was surrounded by the influences of French infidelity. The leading men in the community were infidels. Said he, "I did not undertake to argue with them. I preached one or two great sermons, to show them that I had big guns and was not afraid of them. After that I preached right to their consciences, and the result was that a great revival of religion came up there, and after that I never heard anything about infidelity."

But not only is this positive preaching adapted to the work; it is what multitudes are really hungering for. It is not what the Scriptures do not teach, not what they may possibly be construed to teach, not what they do not hinder one from holding, but what they actually and positively do teach. How often such expressions as this are heard: "I am tired of hearing what our pastor does not believe, his doubts, his speculations, and uncertainties in religion. I want to know what he does believe, or rather what the Word of God authorizes me to believe, what the certainties of religion are." This is the language of many a longing heart to-day. If one has

nothing definite to say in regard to these things, it would be better for him never to enter the pulpit, or at once to leave it, if already in it.

4. But, lastly, the crowning need of the preaching of the times, to render it in the highest degree effective, is a more thorough anointing or enduement with power by the Holy Spirit on the part of the preachers, to qualify them for the work they are called to perform. There is urgent need of more distinctive preaching of Christ and him crucified, of a more faithful unfolding of the Scriptures, and of more of the positiveness of profound conviction in declaring the truth. Yet, unless the preacher's heart be on fire with love for Christ and for souls, unless he be girded and energized by the divine Spirit as a final preparation for his mission, his preaching will be feeble and barren of spiritual results.

That there is such a thing as a divine anointing or baptism of the Spirit is one of the clearest teachings of the Scriptures. It was this which gave the apostles their marvelous power over men. It was this which gave them their clear insight into spiritual truth, and enabled them to understand the things of Christ as they did not and could not before. It was this which led them to realize the momentousness of their mission, the value of an immortal soul, the importance of its salvation. It was the Spirit coming upon them in power at Pentecost in answer to their united prayers, which transformed them, made them men of mighty faith and courage, enabled them to speak the Word "with all boldness." Peter, who had previously quailed before the simple inquiry of a maid servant, could now stand before assembled thousands and boldly charge them with the murder of the Son of God, and press home the truth with such convincing power that three thousand of them were smitten with conviction and led to give themselves in loyal allegiance to the crucified but now risen and ascended One whom they had before despised. He could stand

before the hostile Jewish authorities and declare his purpose to "obey God rather than men." It was this which nerved the apostles for their life-work of suffering and sacrifice for the Master. It was this that transformed Saul, the persecutor of the saints, into Paul, the mighty champion of the very truth he had resisted; it was this that sustained him through all his imprisonments and scourgings as he went forth determined to know only Jesus Christ and him crucified. No one can read the Word of God without recognizing the fact of a divine anointing, or enduement with power from on high, in the final preparation of the apostles for their work of preaching the gospel, while the possibility of a similar spiritual baptism, in kind if not in degree, for God's servants in every age, has been the conviction and more or less the experience of the most successful winners of souls ever since. To this they uniformly attribute their success. It was the Spirit of God, given in answer to their earnest prayers, working in and through them, energizing their minds, attending the truth to the hearts and consciences of those who heard, which wrought so powerfully for their conviction, conversion and upbuilding in the faith. In the light of all this, and of our own experience at times, will any one venture to affirm that there is no such thing as spiritual baptism, a divine enduement with power for God's servants to-day, or that the possibility of it is entirely a thing of the past?

At an important denominational assemblage at Oberlin, Ohio, in 1871, the venerable ex-President Finney gave an address by invitation—the whole audience rising spontaneously as he appeared before them—on the need of enduement with power from on high for God's ministering servants. The following Sabbath, in response to a general desire that they might hear him further in regard to these things, he preached at length in the great First Church. All hearts were swayed by the manifest presence and power of the Spirit, as the wind sways the tree-



tops of the forest. No one who heard him could doubt the reality or the possibility of such an enduement, or the high privilege and the obligation of the Christian ministry to seek it, and that, too, in far larger measure than is usually recognized or experienced. What loyal servant of Christ, indeed, does not recognize this need for himself continually? That this is one of the paramount needs in the preaching of the times may more fully appear as we listen to some of the current criticism upon it. Of one preacher it was said: "His thought is clear, his theology appears to be sound, his sermons are scholarly, he says many good things, but his preaching lacks power." Of another: "His preaching does not take hold." Of another: "He does not preach as if he more than half believed what he says." Of another: "He seems to be satisfied with other successes than those of saving souls and of building up a sanctified church." Of another: "He acts as if uneasy, unsettled, seems to be all the time praying, 'Lord, grant that I may sit at thy right hand, or at thy left, in some great, influential, desirable, large-salaried church,' conveying the impression that he is more intent on self-advancement than upon building up the kingdom." Of another: "His sermons have no point, no well-defined aim. They appear to be prepared much as it is said they build ships down in Maine, constructing them by the mile. When an order is received, they cut off so much, round it off at the bow and stern and send it off." Of another: "He seems to have no courage, no grit; never comes out decidedly on temperance, the Sunday question, or anything else involving opposition to the popular current."

These criticisms are frequently made by intelligent laymen, not upon all preaching, far from that, but upon altogether too much of it. In general, the difficulty may be summed up as a lack of the spirit of self-renunciation, the lack of conviction, the lack of courage,

and especially the lack of power on the part of the ministry. There is a lack of just those elements which the Spirit of God is able to supply and does supply when one is prepared to receive them. One may be never so scholarly, able, brilliant, never so attractive as an orator, yet without this crowning qualification by the Spirit, his preaching, in so far as the true aim of preaching is concerned, will be an utter failure. It may instruct in science, literature, philosophy, art, but it will never save souls or build up the kingdom. The incident is told of a distinguished divine of Scotland who, at the railway station one day, after becoming weary with waiting for the train to move, asked one of the men, "Is there want of water?" "Plenty of water, sir," was the reply, "but it's no bilin'." The main difficulty with much of the preaching of the times is not lack of ability, or culture, or scholarship; the trouble is, "it's no bilin'."

The vital inquiry is, How may one secure the great boon of a divine anointing or enduement with power in larger measure than most possess it?

First, more faith is needed in the Spirit, in his divine personality, in his office and work, one part of which is to do the very thing of which we have been speaking. The unbelief which prevails on this subject is surprising. Second, self-renunciation. Worldly ambition and a divine enduement with power cannot coexist in the same soul. Self must be trampled under foot, heart and life must be consecrated to the one exalted aim, as with Paul; all things else must be made entirely secondary and subordinate. Third, prayer unceasing for this one thing, prompted by an all-consuming desire, until the blessing comes. With these simple but radical conditions met, a divine anointing will most assuredly follow. The Spirit will be imparted. The soul will be energized for the high end set before it. Nor is this something merely for the favored few. It is for all who sufficiently long for it to be willing to pay the

price, for it is an expensive blessing, involving often the slaying and putting under foot of dearest aspirations, the casting out of every idol, a perfect self-surrender to God, a price which not all are willing to pay.

But when the blessing comes, when the heart is fully charged with the Spirit and so with the love of Christ, when one can go forth to his work with deep assurance of the divine presence with him so as to lead men to say, as was once said of a humble Scotch minister, "That man preaches as if the Lord Jesus were at his elbow," his ministry will be infused with new energy, his preaching will be attended with new power, and results will appear in the salvation of souls.

### XIII

#### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO FOREIGN MISSIONS

No department of Christian service, no branch of the work of Christ's kingdom, is nobler, grander, more inspiring, more fruitful in encouraging results than that of foreign missions. Yet no movement which has sought to extend that kingdom has been more misapprehended than this. While many long-standing misconceptions in regard to it have gradually given place in well-informed circles to more correct and wholesome views, many misconceptions still remain in the common thought both of Christian people and the world at large. These misconceptions are a serious hindrance to the speedy evangelization of the world. There is no doubt that the lack of sympathy and cooperation on the part of many persons in the work of foreign missions, their apathy toward it, the withholding of gifts from it, their prejudice, sometimes active opposition against it, may be traced to the erroneous, perverted views of it which they have come to cherish. Hence the importance of an effort to clear away the misconceptions which prevail in the public mind, and to set forth the real truth as to the obligation, the aims, the methods, and the results of foreign missions.

A misconception which some people still entertain is to the effect that those to whom missionaries are sent are alike ignorant, unintelligent, uncivilized barbarians. This has been true in many instances, as it still is in portions of Africa and in some of the islands of the sea. Here the moral condition of the natives is often appalling. Debasing heathenish customs prevail. The awfulness of social conditions cannot be described. Cannibalism is not

yet entirely extinct. But this is far from being the condition of all or even of most of the peoples to whom missionaries are sent. India, Japan and China, where missionary operations are perhaps conducted on the most extensive scale, are lands of ancient civilization; the people there have a history, with records extending back for centuries; a literature also, with not a little that is valuable in it; while in vigor of intellect, in keenness of perception, in ability to learn, they are not, in native endowment, inferior to Western races; in some instances they even excel them. This is not true of all who occupy these lands. In many sections of them the masses of the people are low down in the moral scale, with mental powers correspondingly dulled. It is a significant fact that in some of their institutions of learning—often now with American or English educators at the head—the very same studies are pursued as in this country, and the students, heathen though they may be, raise and discuss the very same questions upon philosophical and theological themes as do students in institutions in this or in any other enlightened country. In commercial affairs, sometimes in political, there are natives of these countries, which we call pagan, who are as sharp and keen, and as far-reaching in their plans and operations, as are the great merchants and statesmen who enjoy the advantages of a Christian civilization.

It is a misconception, therefore, to suppose that all the heathen are ignorant and degraded barbarians.

The degree of intelligence and progress in some of these pagan lands suggests another misconception which has found lodgment in the minds of not a few, viz.: That in such lands as China and India, and in some nominally Christian countries, like Armenia, Mexico, Spain, there is no need of missionary labor; that the people are getting along well enough as they are.

It is sufficient to say in reply that considerable intelligence and some degree of culture do not save any one in

heathendom, any more than they do here at home, or in any other Christian land. The truth is, unregenerate human nature in civilized paganism is like unregenerate human nature elsewhere. According to the testimony of those who are well informed and most competent to judge, the Scripture description of the human heart as "deceitful above all things, and . . . desperately sick," is emphatically true of the heathen world at its best. If in the better pagan countries there is less of that grosser external sin which prevails among the more degraded races, it is by no means lacking; while the subtler, more hidden sins of the heart, deception, lying, perjury, covetousness, selfishness, pride, lustful desire, indifference to suffering and want in others, abound to such a degree and are so deeply ingrained in the nature of those who commit them as to render it exceedingly difficult to impress moral and spiritual truth upon their minds. Corruption in both public and private life is universal. Degrading superstitions prevail, moral standards and ideals of righteousness are low. Life stagnates. The existing religious systems, while containing some truth, are not morally uplifting. Hinduism has been called a deification of cruelty, lust and murder. Woman is degraded by its influence. The foundations of life are rotten. Neither in Hinduism nor in Brahminism nor in Confucianism, is there any power to renovate and transform the lives of men. These religions have all been tested for centuries, and have been found wanting. Sin, ruin and despair still brood over the foremost of the pagan countries as when Christ came to redeem the world. The one conspicuous lack of the heathen systems is the power to regenerate the heart or to transform character and life, to bring peace and comfort to the troubled and sorrowing soul. The same is true of the emasculated Christianity of those nominally Christian lands where the religion of Jesus has degenerated into a mere form and is without vitality or spiritual power.

Even in the most enlightened lands, with all their Christian institutions and varied moral agencies, there is still need of the most earnest and aggressive effort. No one thinks it unnecessary. Much more, then, is the gospel needed in these other lands where Christianity has not been established, or where Christian influences are as yet but few and relatively feeble. The gospel is needed to regenerate men, to lift up and purify society, to awaken the higher aspirations, to present lofty ideals of righteousness, and to make known the rich resources of grace in Jesus Christ by which these ideals may be realized. The gospel is the heaven-given remedy for the sins and ills of the world. Its path has always been the path of progress, mental, moral, social, civil, national. It is in accord with the nature of Christianity that those who have experienced its blessings should be eager that the whole world should possess them.

That Christianity is not needed in the more advanced pagan or nominally Christian lands cannot be true. In the highest and truest sense, it is the "White Man's Burden" to alleviate their moral condition by giving them that which includes in itself all blessings, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Another erroneous view—a misconception which is not often met with in intelligent circles—is to the effect that almost any one who is possessed of piety will do for missionary service, whatever may be his deficiencies in other respects; that one who may not be fitted to succeed in the Christian ministry or in any form of Christian service at home may yet be sent abroad; that therefore our foreign missionaries as a class are inferior men. Such misconceptions as these have no grounds upon which to rest. In view of the many-sidedness of missionary operations as now conducted and in view of the intelligence and mental acumen of many of the peoples to whom the gospel is sent, there is need of and demand for the best, the brightest, the most thoroughly equipped

men available. The high character and quality of missionaries as a class is abundantly and indisputably attested by the results of their labors, and by the testimony of those most competent to judge. "There is no class of men upon the earth, whether considered as scholars, or philanthropists, or as gentlemen, who have earned for themselves a more distinguished reputation." Such is the tribute to foreign missionaries, in the *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge*, and this is but one of many similar tributes to be gathered from other equally trustworthy sources. Says the Earl of Shaftesbury, "I do not believe that in the whole history of missions, I do not believe that in the history of diplomacy, or in the history of any negotiations carried on between man and man, we can find anything equal to the wisdom, the soundness, and the pure evangelical truth of the men who constitute the American mission to Turkey." And, he might have added, to any other land to which Christian missionaries have gone.

The standard of qualifications for the missionary service has been steadily rising. Not every one who now applies to be sent abroad is accepted. There is need of sound learning and the best scholarship. The Bible and other valuable books are to be translated into languages which, in many cases, must first be reduced to writing. Instruction is to be given in colleges and theological seminaries, in training converted natives to be preachers and teachers and to be leaders among their people. There is need of sound judgment and the highest wisdom in dealing with the difficult and perplexing questions which constantly arise on mission fields, and which the missionaries must face and settle. There is scope for large executive ability in missionary service. There is, in fact, demand for all the talents one may possess, talents of the highest order, if one would be a successful missionary in these modern times. One must be preacher, educator, bishop, editor, translator, manager, a wise counselor, a

religious statesman. For this many-sided service only such men as are most likely to succeed at home are now sought for foreign fields. There is also call for the services of intelligent and efficient laymen in this work, and their usefulness is being more and more demonstrated.

Still another misconception is, that the heathen nations are eagerly waiting for the gospel, stretching out their hands to receive it, crying out, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us." It would greatly simplify the work of foreign missions, would relieve it of many of its greatest and most determined hindrances, were this true. Unfortunately, it is not true. The mass of people in the heathen world are not eager for the gospel, are satisfied with what they have, knowing nothing better, and are inclined to resent, rather than otherwise, any interference with long-established customs and beliefs. It is this satisfaction with what they have, this lack of desire for Christianity, this indifference to its promised blessings, which constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to the progress of foreign missionary work.

It may be true that a few persons in these lands are dissatisfied with their condition and are prepared to listen appreciatively to the proclamation of the new faith and to embrace it, as offering to them a surer hope for the future than they now have, or at least more comfort and help for the present. It is this class which the missionary first of all seeks to discover and reach, but in some fields the number of such persons seems to be very small; sometimes, apparently, there are none at all. Usually the desire for something better than the religion one possesses must be awakened before the gospel can be appreciated.

It is only in the sense of the real, though unconscious, need of the gospel on the part of the heathen that they can truthfully be said to be stretching out their hands to receive it. Missionaries seek to meet this need of the human heart, even if the heathen themselves do not recognize it.

Another misconception is that some faiths, like Mohammedanism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Brahminism, will never succumb to Christianity; that it is useless to try to convert nations to the Christian faith which can boast of religious systems which were hoary with age when Christianity was brought into the world, systems which are deeply rooted in the life and habits of thought and in the prejudices of their adherents.

As a matter of fact, not a few adherents of these ancient faiths have already yielded their allegiance to Christianity, which is conclusive proof that, while it may be difficult, it is not impossible to reach devotees to those faiths with the truth as it is in Jesus. They may not be converted in masses. This is not the divine plan. The gospel is designed for individuals, and it is given to them one by one. Sometimes, though rarely, circumstances are favorable to the winning of large numbers. Although the adherents of some systems may be more easily accessible to the truth than others, it is not true that any pagan religion is an absolute barrier against Christianity, or that it is impossible to overcome it. More and more it is being demonstrated that Christianity is fitted, as it was designed, to be the universal religion, and that it is destined, ultimately, to supersede all other religions. It has world-wide or universal elements in it such as no other possesses. It meets perfectly the needs of universal human nature. This is not true of any other religion which exists. Christianity is the exact counterpart of the soul's cravings, in whatever condition, or land, or age. All this points to its ultimate supremacy and prevalence. Its aggressiveness, its innate potency, its wide-spreading, ever-expanding dissemination, and its marvelous victories over mighty obstacles are fast verifying God's promise that Christ's kingdom shall be universal. It may require time to bring this about, but we are not to forget that with the Lord a thousand years are as one day.

The answer in general to all pessimistic views in regard

to the ultimate triumph of Christianity should be, "Ye do err, not knowing . . . the power of God." Mission work is full of surprises—so is all Christian work—but these surprises meet us more frequently in work abroad than here at home. This has been its history. Witness the conversion of the Karens as the result of the preaching of Judson; the great revivals in the Hawaiian Islands; the conversion of the Lanthals and of hundreds of thousands in the Baptist mission to the Telugus; the transformation of the Fiji Islands within a single generation; and the steady progress the gospel is now making both in Japan and China. Nothing in the heart of man is too difficult for the grace of God to overcome; no obstacles to the progress of Christianity in the world are too stubborn for the providence of God to surmount. Thus it has always been; thus it will continue to be.

Another fact to be taken into account is this, that many of these ancient faiths are showing signs of decay, while Christianity was never more vital, virile, vigorous, never more confident, making greater gains or winning more striking victories than at the present time. No religious system of the world has power permanently to stay its progress, or to hold out against it.

Still another misconception is that the various pagan systems and religions are all error, that there is no truth in them. This is a mistake. As knowledge of these systems has increased, it has been discovered that, together with all that is erroneous and false in them, much truth is mingled, now more, now less, always some. The science of Comparative Religion is rendering valuable service through the information it is bringing to light in regard to these old religions. The ethical ideals of some of them are a surprise. In them we are glad to recognize many of the universal instincts, the moral intuitions, which are common to the race, the cravings of humanity after spiritual experiences. Many of the truths of natural religion are brought out in them.

Yet with all the truth contained in these ancient systems of religious faith, much error is commingled with superstition and a vast deal of useless rubbish, some of it worse than useless, while the one great lack in them all is that which men, when spiritually awakened, most need and desire—salvation. They lack motive, transforming power, grace to overcome sin. On the other hand, Christianity includes all the truth there is in any and all these pagan systems, and adds a vast deal more. It discloses all that the human soul needs to know for its highest present and eternal welfare. Above all, it is able to save men from sin, to rescue them from its thralldom. This is its supreme, distinctive feature. In this, as in all other respects, Christianity towers infinitely above all the faiths, so-called, of the world. We may, we should, cordially admit all the truth, all the good there is in these old faiths, as Paul did in the faith of the Athenians, yet, when this has been done, there remains a mighty gulf between them and the Christian faith. In its ideals, in its motives, in its aims, especially in its power of redemption—in which it stands alone—Christianity rises infinitely above all the religious systems of the world. It gathers up into itself all the truth there is in other systems of religion, adds to it direct revelations from God, which enable men to realize in the life that now is their own highest aspirations, and which bring them into lasting harmony with their Creator. The religion that can do this must be universal.

A misconception which is frequently expressed is to the effect that only when all the heathen at home are evangelized will it be time to think about the conversion of the rest of the world.

This is a narrow, selfish, unintelligent view to take of Christ's kingdom and its advancement, and of our own obligation with reference to its extension. Christ directed the disciples to go into all the world and declare the gospel message to all the nations. The command holds

good for to-day. The whole world lieth in wickedness still, and if Christian people do not send the gospel to those in darkness, who will? It is true there are plenty of heathen at home, not only among the lowly and debased, but among the refined and cultured as well. But in countries like ours, the gospel message has been published, is being published, with ten thousand churches constantly open to all classes and conditions of people, and constantly inviting them in. It is not as if they had no opportunity, no invitation, no one to care for them, no means of knowing the truth. They may accept the blessings of the gospel if they will. It is not so in these distant lands. Millions of the people there have never heard the glad tidings of salvation. The gospel messengers are very few, the people are perishing in their sins, and no helping hand is stretched forth to save. The responsibility is laid upon Christians to give the gospel to peoples less favored than those of their own lands. This is the way the apostles understood their commission, this is the interpretation which the Church should give to its commission to-day. The apostles began their evangelizing work at Jerusalem, but they did not stop there. They went on beyond the bounds of their own land. Yet the work at home was not neglected. Those who had received the gospel were expected to communicate it to others about them, and they did so. They helped to promote the kingdom where they were, while the apostles went forth to introduce the gospel leaven into other lands, that thus the work might progress in every place at once. If there were a dearth of Christian workers at home in this age, missionary indifference might be excused. Some of these workers are interested in one form of service, some in another; some in home missions, some in foreign. Provision should be made for the gratification of the foreign missionary impulse.

The truth is, Christian missions is but another term for aggressive Christianity. All true missionary work is but

an extension of Christianity, and the only difference between the home work and the foreign is merely a difference in geography. Christ's directions to his disciples of old, and his directions by his Spirit and his providence to all his believing ones to-day, are to extend the knowledge of the gospel as rapidly as possible, by all means at command, to the ends of the earth—to the remotest bounds of the home land, and to all the less favored peoples in all quarters of the globe. The true spirit of Christianity is to desire and to seek that others everywhere, the world over, enjoy the same blessings which Christian people themselves have received. Furthermore, it is a notable fact, often observed, that where most interest prevails in the foreign work, there is also most appreciation of the needs of the work at home, and most is done for the home field. On the other hand, it is too often the case that those who object to giving for foreign missions are not noted for their generosity for Christian work at home. If they were always zealous and generous in seeking to convert the heathen at home, there would be less inconsistency in their attitude toward work among the heathen abroad.

A misconception which prevails with some, and to which expression is frequently given, is to the effect that it requires a dollar—sometimes the amount is put at two dollars—to get one dollar to the heathen; in other words, that an altogether undue proportion of that which is contributed for foreign missions is absorbed in the expenses of administration.

It is easy to show by facts which are readily accessible that such statements as these are wild and reckless. Take the American Board, for instance, one of our oldest and best known foreign missionary societies. Its reports show—have shown for years—that of every dollar contributed for the work abroad, ninety-two and a half cents are expended on the field. The remaining seven and a half cents are needed to cover the cost of collecting and

transmitting the money, including the home agencies, office-rent, correspondence, postage, publications to disseminate missionary intelligence, and the salaries of those who devote all their time to the home department of the foreign work. These are the expenses of administration. Is that an extravagant expenditure? How many purely business enterprises, doing as large a business, one extending over a greater portion of our own country and carrying on operations in twenty countries abroad, can make a better showing than that? And what is true of the American Board is no doubt true of foreign missionary societies in other religious bodies, while, if the receipts for foreign missions were doubled or trebled, the expenses of administration would be proportionately less.

No great benevolent or other enterprise is more economically administered than that of foreign missions. An acquaintance with the facts in the case would quickly dispose of the charge of extravagance in the matter of administrative expenses of our foreign boards.

It is a misconception that there is nothing in missionary life and experience at all to compensate for the sacrifice involved in becoming a missionary—the giving up of home and friends and native land, the privileges and enjoyments of a Christian civilization, to bury oneself among a strange people, in a far distant land, with grave difficulties and obstacles constantly to be encountered.

Such a view of foreign missionary work loses sight of the fact that those who engage in it do not do so unwillingly, or merely from a hard sense of duty. They are not uninformed as to the nature of the work they undertake, its hardships, its sacrifices, the deprivations involved in it, or the loneliness to which they are likely to be exposed from limited companionship. But, impelled by their love to Christ, desirous of devoting their lives to his service, and drawn to this form of service in particular, they go forth voluntarily and cheerfully, assured, as they go, of the blessing and the sustaining grace of God. As

they labor on, as they witness the manifestations of God's grace, observe the unfolding of his providence, their interest in the work grows, their minds and hearts are filled with it, they appreciate the grandeur and the glory of it, it occupies all their time, their energy, their thought. Gladly do they give to it all their strength, and almost invariably, after visiting their native land for a season of needed rest, do they find themselves eager to return.

Then, too, there are the reactive benefits of the work itself. The views of the missionaries are broadened, their knowledge is increased, all their powers are called into exercise and are correspondingly strengthened. Much depends upon the missionary himself as to the degree of profit which he derives, but to one who is eager for self-improvement there is every facility. As to spiritual experience, one is brought into peculiarly close relations of fellowship with God. One is more consciously dependent upon him in the foreign field than at home; the promises mean more; one is led to appropriate them more fully: so that, on the whole, while not indifferent to the hardships and deprivations of his work, the missionary has meat to eat of which the world, even the Christian world, knows nothing. The compensations of missionary service are abundant and constant to him who has a heart to appreciate them, while no Christian workers, as a class, appear to be happier than foreign missionaries, as none are likely to receive a more star-studded crown of rejoicing at the end.

Still another misconception with many is that it is practically impossible to awaken in our churches a deep, live interest in foreign missions. It is not so. What has been done can be done again. Many churches have been aroused to the importance of this work. No subject is more interesting to them, no topic when announced calls out so hearty a response or so large an attendance. This is far from being the case in all churches. Often the reverse is true. The difficulty is, many churches

have not been informed as to the facts. Missionary intelligence has not been kept persistently and in attractive form before them. Little pains have been taken wisely to cultivate an interest in the foreign field. No theme is more interesting in itself, none is more fascinating if properly presented, no narrations are more thrilling than accounts of missionary labor. What is there in the annals of religious life and work at all comparable with the history of the beginnings, the progress, the triumphs of missionary work in such fields, for instance, as Madagascar, India, on many groups of islands in the Pacific, like the Fiji, the Society, the Hawaiian Islands, the New Hebrides, and in New Zealand?

The truth is, there is no enterprise in the world to-day so great, so grand, projected on so magnificent a scale, as that of foreign missions, and no enterprise is so uniformly successful. It seeks to introduce and to establish a Christian civilization in lands destitute of them, to give a Christian literature, Christian education, Christian influences and Christian institutions of every kind, to countries which have no knowledge of them. Marvelous triumphs have been already won, and every mail brings tidings of further victories for the cause of Christ. In such circumstances, no church can be regarded as abreast of the times which is not interested and fully informed in regard to foreign missions. No pastor can be said to be doing his duty who does not keep missionary intelligence before his people. No Christian layman can properly be regarded as intelligent who is without information in regard to modern church history as it is developing in the distant lands to which our missionaries are sent. Churches and people can be interested. It is culpable in the highest degree not to be interested.

Having noticed various misconceptions in regard to foreign missions, we next inquire as to the true aim of Christian work abroad, its motives and the ends which it

strives to attain. Various views have prevailed, various views have impelled to effort. Many of the pioneers of modern missions, even, have gone forth with no very clear conception as to just what they were to accomplish. They were obeying Christ's last command, yet with but an imperfect idea of what that command involved. It was only as the work advanced that it gradually became manifest how comprehensive Christ's direction really is, how many-sided is the work of foreign missions, and how great the importance of system and the wise adaptation of means to ends in its prosecution.

First, as to the aim of foreign missions. It is not, primarily, the overthrow of false religious systems in pagan lands. These systems will be overthrown if Christianity prevails, but the work of foreign missions, as now conceived, is positive rather than negative. The main stress is laid upon building up the Christian faith, rather than tearing down false systems of faith. The aim is to explain and set forth to the heathen the unknown God, whom many of them, like the Athenians of old, ignorantly worship, rather than to prove to them the falsity of their own beliefs. This latter is done, incidentally, but this is not the primary purpose of foreign missions. Yet in the very process of building up the new, the old will necessarily be gradually undermined and overthrown.

Nor is it the aim of foreign missions to build up the Church as an organization. Unquestionably, ambition to do this actuated much of the earlier work of Christian missions. Not that individual conversion was neglected, but that the dominant idea rather was the enlargement, the strengthening of the Church as the organized body of Christ. Everything was made to bend to that. That which is emphasized now in foreign missionary work, and which it was manifestly designed should be emphasized, is the winning of men to Christ, building them up in righteous character, and establishing Christian influences

and Christian institutions permanently among the people. This is the central idea in the foreign, as it is in the home work. As a result, the Christian Church cannot fail to be strengthened, but this is not, of itself, the primary aim in foreign missions.

Nor, again, is the aim of Christian work abroad merely philanthropic—a purpose to give the heathen the advantages of a higher and better civilization, or to promote improved social conditions among them. All this is sadly needed, it is a noble impulse which impels to an effort to supply the need, and when Christianity is established such results are invariably produced. But it is not the aim of foreign missions, directly, to bring about such results. Properly speaking, these are the fruits of Christianity. The surest way to civilize the heathen is to Christianize them. As they become Christian disciples, the desire for improved conditions in every aspect is awakened, and they are led to seek them. What civilization can do without Christianity we see illustrated in the moral corruption of the Roman Empire. What Christianity can do without civilization, or how, rather, Christianity stimulates and promotes civilization, has been demonstrated repeatedly in modern mission fields. Both civilization and Christianity are needed, but Christianity in its full significance includes civilization. In order to lay foundations for the truest and most enduring civilization, there is need that men first be regenerated.

Once more, the work of foreign missions is not primarily to save the heathen from perdition. They will be saved from perdition if they accept Christ's gospel, but this is a result, not the primary aim. This as a motive was emphasized formerly more than it is at present. There is abundant ground for apprehension respecting the future state of the heathen, since most of them, even without the knowledge of Christianity, have sinned against the light of nature and of conscience. But the main stress is to be laid not upon the negative, but upon

the positive aspects of redemption. The aim in Christian work abroad, as in Christian work at home, is to persuade men to forsake sin and embrace Christ, and then to build them up in righteous, Christlike character. As this is done, the peril of sin grows correspondingly less. This is a natural consequence, a result of faith. Men are thus saved to themselves, to society, to the world while they live, and saved to God with an everlasting salvation in the world to come. Thus the scope of Christian work in pagan lands, as at home, is far broader than simply to save men from perdition. They are saved from perdition through accepting Christ, but the blessings of salvation are of vastly wider range than this alone. They have to do with the developing of the loftiest possibilities of human nature, both for this life and the next.

We have been speaking of what the aim of foreign missions is not. Positively, the aim of foreign missions, as of Christian work at home, and as was the gospel's aim in the beginning, is undoubtedly the saving of men. The Son of man came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. He laid the same responsibility upon his followers. They were to go into all the world, making disciples of all nations, and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them. They were to make proclamation of the glad tidings to men everywhere and were to seek to win them to Christ and to a higher and nobler life. Rescue from thralldom to sin was now possible. Faith in Christ was the victory; his grace was available, and was adequate to secure it. Nor was there any other name than that of Christ whereby redemption was possible.

This, then, is the supreme object of foreign missions, the saving of men; salvation in the full, broad sense—saving from sin and its perils, but at the same time developing all the graces of Christian character, all the higher possibilities of their nature, all the rich experience of a full spiritual life. It is to save men to them-

selves, to society, to the world, to God, to save them with an everlasting salvation, for the glory of God, that as soon as possible he may be recognized as King of kings and Lord of lords over the heathen, as over the Christian world, that foreign missions exist.

So, then, it is not the primary aim of foreign missions to overturn the strongly entrenched pagan systems, although it is inevitable that in due time they will be supplanted by Christianity. It is not to build up the visible, organized Church, or any branch of it, important as the Church may be as an agency to promote Christian ends, and as, from the nature of the case, it must be built up as the work of missions advances. It is not philanthropic work primarily, to give the heathen a better civilization and better social conditions, though this, too, must inevitably result from the introduction of the gospel. It is not primarily to save the heathen from perdition, though by accepting the gospel they will be saved from it. The central aim of foreign missions, an aim which is never to be lost sight of, is to save men. It is to evangelize the nations, it is to bring a sinful world back to God. It is to make known Christ and his salvation to those who are now ignorant of them, make them known to all classes and conditions of men—the lowest and most debased as well as the highest, to man as man. After men have accepted the gospel and become disciples of Christ, its aim is to train them in the new life, root and ground them in the truth, show them how to grow in holiness and Christlikeness of character, and to become in turn evangelists and benefactors to their own people. It is to introduce into heathen lands, whether the more advanced or the more degraded, all the forces of the gospel, all the influences and agencies of a Christian civilization, that thus their condition may be improved materially, socially, mentally, morally, spiritually; that the best that is in them may be developed; that all the riches of God's grace may be imparted to them, and that

this work of renovation and moral elevation may be carried on among their inhabitants permanently.

This is the great, grand aim of foreign missionary service, this is what is involved in it as it is now understood by the churches, and as Christ intended it should be understood when he gave his last command to his disciples to go forth into all the world and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever he commanded them. To realize this purpose requires courage, faith, patience, for gigantic obstacles are in the way, and a long time will be required to remove them; but in response to Christ's call, in his command, in his providence, by his Spirit, and prompted by love, men have gone forth—consecrated, enthusiastic, heroic, braving untold hardships often, until now the heralds of salvation have penetrated into all the dark places of the earth, multitudes have been won to Christ and are themselves pressing forward the work with ever-increasing momentum and power.

We turn next to consider how this work of foreign missions is carried on, the methods and the agencies employed, what wisdom and efficiency in its prosecution have been gained from experience. Many misconceptions prevail in regard to Christian service abroad,—rather, there is a woful lack of information respecting it.

In observing the methods now employed in the discharge of the duties of this service, we cannot fail to see that they are the outcome of an evolutionary process. At first, ideas of what was to be done were crude, methods were imperfect and inadequate, mistakes and failure were frequent. Yet out of this experience the nature and needs of foreign fields have become so well understood, and the work itself so systematized, that now it is possible to conduct it with a statesmanlike grasp of the situation, with a wise adaptation of the best means at command to the ends which we desire to reach.

A century ago there was little or no organization in the work of missions. Individuals went where they pleased, worked as they chose, were supported according to no fixed plan. Sometimes they provided for themselves, sometimes they depended upon those to whom they went, sometimes they were sustained by churches or friends at home. Faithful work was done, but it is hardly to be supposed that by such haphazard, irregular methods the largest and best results be realized. Later there came to be more system; aggressive work was undertaken in a more orderly way, according to well-defined principles; missionaries went forth under definite instructions and with support assured; until now, through wisdom gained by experience, the duties of those who go abroad and of those who remain at home are clearly defined. The duty of those who remain at home is to provide suitable men, secure the means for their support, take general supervision of those who go abroad, although not in any such way as to hinder their essential freedom of action. Many of the denominations have their foreign missionary organization or board. In fact, there is scarcely a denomination of any size or influence in this country which is not represented in one or more mission fields. Some missionary organizations are independent of church or ecclesiastical control. Each of these various organizations adopts such methods and plans at home to awaken and sustain missionary interests, to select suitable men, and to procure the necessary means, as experience has demonstrated to be wise. The present methods of administering the home side of the foreign service have been gradually evolved.

This is true, also, of methods of work abroad. Experience has been the teacher. The practical methods of to-day are far in advance of those which were formerly employed, while the efficiency of the work has correspondingly increased. Usually the missionaries of a particular society, occupying a certain territory, consti-

tute what is called a mission. This mission is simply an association of missionaries on the field, and is really a branch or auxiliary of the board at home, "organized for the more methodical conduct of work in the field, and for the decision of such questions as arise which cannot be conveniently referred to the home society." This mission meets annually or oftener, at some station, and transacts such business in the interest of the work as properly comes before it. The mission station is a section or portion of the general mission. It is usually located in a city, with a considerable section of the country around as the field of its operations. An out-station is subordinate to the station, as the station is subordinate to the mission. In all branches of the work converted natives, wisely selected, are employed as helpers. Some of these natives develop a high degree of ability.

The first work of the missionary abroad, after familiarizing himself with the language—unless the field to which he goes is one in which the work is already furnished with the usual missionary agencies—is evangelistic. The aim is to make the people aware of their spiritual needs, and then to present Christ as the one by whom these needs are to be met. This evangelizing work has been carried on through personal intercourse; by visiting the people at their homes; by preaching as there has been opportunity, in a street, or public square, or other place where men congregate, at a private house, or in a public hall; by the distribution of the Scriptures or portions of them or tracts, where the natives are able to read; through medical assistance, which is one of the surest means of gaining access to the people; through the agency of women for women—a most important branch of missionary work in those countries where women are otherwise inaccessible. As a result of these various methods of coming into personal contact with the people and presenting to them their spiritual needs, many have been won to Christ. Sometimes this evangelizing work is

confined to a particular city, sometimes it is carried on in a number of places by tours among the people. It is in some such ways as these that missionaries come into vital contact with the natives and give them the gospel message the first time they go among them. In this way a foundation for future work is laid. Then other agencies are set in operation.

After conversion, the native Christian character is to be developed. This is a matter of the first importance in view of the conditions of life which surround these immature believers, and of the customs and vices with which they have always been familiar. Careful, long-continued training is required. In training men for domestic, social, civic duties, and in providing for the extension of the work and its permanence through native agencies, various methods are employed.

One of them is education. In its earlier and more rudimentary stage this educational training may be furnished by expository preaching or Bible-class instruction. The Christian homes of the missionaries are also very helpful in this connection. Through their uplifting influences they serve a purpose corresponding to that of "social settlements" in our cities at home. Later, as the work advances, schools are established. These schools are of all grades, according as the need develops, from the kindergarten to the university. Not only do these schools give opportunity for the instruction of the children of families brought under the influence of the gospel, but also for the training of native teachers and preachers and helpers to assist the missionaries and to become leaders among their own people. In this way there have gradually grown up at missionary centers various educational institutions, many of which compare favorably with similar institutions at home. These institutions—at first manned by the missionaries—are gradually given more or less, as the situation warrants, into the hands of natives who have proved their ability

to teach. Boarding-schools and day-schools for both boys and girls are to be found almost everywhere in mission fields. Industrial schools, too, have been introduced more recently, and have proved to be exceedingly valuable. In some cases Christian institutions have been established and maintained upon a basis entirely independent of mission boards, and have exerted large influence. Robert College, at Constantinople, is a notable instance.

Another phase of educational work in connection with foreign missions is that of Bible translation and distribution. This is one of the first needs. It has often been a difficult work to reduce barbarous tongues to writing, and then to make translations into them, but now all important mission fields are supplied with the Scriptures, entire or in part, in the native tongue. Other valuable works have also been translated, frequently religious papers are published and circulated. Thus gradually a Christian literature is provided. Bibles, books of devotion, hymns, Christian instruction, commentaries, tracts—all these and many other works are made accessible to those who can read them.

But the great agency, after all, for developing Christian character and for extending and perpetuating the work of missions, is to be found in the native church. "It was the work of the apostles and their immediate successors to raise up and develop in each community a church homogeneous to that community, and this has been the aim of missionaries ever since. While in general the organization of these churches has conformed to the type of the churches represented by the missionaries, scope has also been allowed for any peculiar needs which might pertain to the country or people." While these special needs may vary in different lands, these missionary churches have many characteristics in common. Sometimes it is necessary to assist in the maintenance of them for a season, for now as of old it is to the poor that

the gospel is principally preached even in these lands, but they are brought to self-support as soon as possible. The purpose of missions, as now carried on, is to develop the ability of Christian natives so wisely and so rapidly that in the near future the entire responsibility for the evangelization of their respective countries may be placed in their hands.

What has now been said gives some idea of the scope and the methods of foreign missions as we think of them to-day. The representatives of our home churches go into a foreign country or among a strange people and introduce the gospel with the Christian agencies which accompany it. They seek to save men and to train them in the Christian life, to provide schools, to give them the Bible in their own tongue, gradually to furnish a Christian literature. The aim is not merely to secure immediate results, but so to establish Christian institutions that the work may go forward continuously during the generations to come, or until the whole people are brought under the influence of the gospel. The missionary aims at nothing less than to transfer the blessings of a truly Christian civilization to every pagan country in the whole world.

We are now prepared to consider, briefly, what has been accomplished by foreign missions. There are those who declare that the results of missions do not warrant the sacrifice and the expenditure involved. This is a serious misconception, based upon a very superficial understanding of what has been accomplished. The facts prove the reverse. So numerous and varied are the results of missionary operations that it is by no means easy to summarize them. To do so would be like trying to summarize the results of Christianity in the world. The same results which Christianity produces at home, and wherever it is established, it is all the time producing in greater or less degree in pagan lands. It introduces

new ideas among the people, new ideals of life, new motives, new aims, stimulates a stagnant intellectual life, sets men to thinking, quickens a sluggish moral sense, a deadened conscience, exalts social life, awakens new and higher aspirations. Man is ennobled, woman is elevated, sanctity is given to the marriage relation, home is made a home, a new value attaches to childhood, a new tenderness is felt for old age, for the sick and infirm. As soon as the gospel is received, it sets all the forces of a Christian civilization into operation.

The many-sided views of the work of foreign missions and the marvelous character of the results achieved may be illustrated by a single example out of many, but one which makes unmistakably plain what the real nature of foreign missions is, how this takes hold of and elevates the individual not only, but the life of the people as well, setting forth in a way which no one can gainsay the power of the grace of God to renew the heart and to revolutionize the character and life. I refer to the Fiji Islands, and to the results wrought there by the gospel. Within two generations the entire population has been transformed from the degradation of cannibalism and kindred evils to a civilized, Christianized condition. The large majority of them have become attendants upon the sanctuary. The dominant and controlling influences in the Islands are decidedly Christian.

The primitive darkness of those islands was dense. While all aborigines of the Pacific were barbarous, the Fijis were preeminently so. The very name Fiji was a synonym for whatever is inhuman. A full description of their former condition cannot be given. The missionaries who labored among them declare that they saw scenes too horrible to be described, too full of fiendish cruelty to be imagined. Infanticide was so common that two-thirds of the children, especially female children, were put to death. A mother would often strangle her own child, and then herself dig a grave and bury it. The

aged, infirm and sick were generally put to death. Few people, indeed, died in a natural way, and few attained to old age. Those who became widows were at once strangled. It was the privilege of the oldest son, on the death of his father, to take the lead in strangling his mother. But the worst horror was cannibalism, which prevailed to an extent and with horrors unsurpassed elsewhere in the world. This practice was encouraged by the religion of the natives, the supposition being that the gods, to whom they offered their victims in sacrifice, devoured the spirit, while they themselves ate the bodies. The bodies of those who were shipwrecked and of those who were slain in war or executed for any cause by order of the chiefs were invariably eaten, while for almost all festivities human flesh was considered essential. There was little sense of the value of human life. The missionaries tell how one king was accustomed to return from tributary islands with bodies of infants hanging from the yard-arm of his canoe as tribute exacted for food from their parents. These revolting facts, which are merely samples of multitudes of similar instances in which the life of the people abounded before the introduction of Christianity, sufficiently demonstrate how low, degraded, barbarous, inhuman, was the original condition of the people of these islands. Social life was at its lowest ebb, the people were fiends, monsters of inhumanity and lust. If there was ever a discouraging, hopeless field for reformatory effort, it would seem to have been here. If the gospel could transform the life and character of the Fijis, nothing could be too difficult for it to attempt. Yet in spite of all the obstacles, Christianity achieved in the Fiji Islands one of the most signal triumphs of its history. All this barbarism was changed, radically, completely, solely through the influence of Christianity. No other agency is claimed as having wrought this result. And this marvelous transformation was brought about within a few years from the time the gospel was first made known to the natives.

The story of the gospel among the Fijis is thrilling. A widespread epidemic prevailed in one of the islands, threatening to sweep off the entire population. Extraordinary offerings were made to the gods to obtain relief, but without avail. One of the chiefs, having heard incidentally of the great Jehovah whom the natives of the Society Islands had been taught to worship, persuaded the people in their despair to undertake the worship of this new god. They did so, but finding themselves in need of instruction, Christian teachers were sent for, and thus the work among them was definitely begun. From this time it went rapidly forward. In a few years almost the entire population of the island united with the church, and many went forth as missionaries to other islands of the group until at length they were all evangelized. This result was not brought about without many hardships, sacrifices and terrible experiences on the part of the faithful Wesleyan missionaries, but they persevered until the wonderful success which crowned their labors was realized. In a few years heathenism was universally renounced and the awful horrors of cannibalism ceased. Churches were organized, until now nearly a thousand are scattered through the Fiji group. Schools were established, a Christian literature was introduced, and all the forms of Christian civilization were adopted. Whereas two generations ago there was not a single Christian in the Islands, to-day there is not an avowed heathen. Miss Gordon Cumming in her book, "At Home in Fiji," has remarked that it is difficult now to imagine that this people, with their mellifluous speech and almost Parisian manners, are the cannibals of less than a century ago. Now, family worship is observed in almost every home, and the people are conducting mission enterprises with enthusiasm in the pagan islands farther west. No more remarkable transformation has ever been reported in the annals of missions. It seems as if Providence had selected a people in the worst conceivable condition among

whom to accomplish a work which should stand for all time as an illustration before the world of the marvelous power of the gospel of Christ to revolutionize life and character, to revolutionize society, to uplift and elevate men in every respect.

This is a simple, concrete example which shows the nature of foreign missionary work, its aims and its results. If it is exceptionally striking, it is so because of the awful condition of the islanders when the gospel was first brought to them, and it shows all the more forcibly its tremendous innate energy and transforming power. Many other examples illustrating the same results are available, some almost as remarkable, but this will suffice. Not all the peoples to whom the missionaries go are by any means as debased as were the Fijis, nor are the results in all cases as marked, or the contrasts as pronounced, but everywhere the effects are the same in kind, morally, spiritually, even materially, wherever the gospel gains a foothold.

Fifty years ago there was not a Christian in the New Hebrides. Now twenty of the islands of the group have been evangelized. Seventy-five years ago there was not a convert in all Polynesia. Now the number is more than 100,000, with at least half a million adherents. There was not a native Christian in the Friendly Islands half a century ago. Now there are more than 30,000 church-members. In the Micronesian Islands there are now about fifty self-supporting churches and more than 5000 professing Christians. Less than a generation ago there was not a native convert in the Islands. The story of missions in New Zealand, in the Hawaiian Islands, in the Society group, is marvelously interesting. Three hundred of the Pacific islands are now evangelized. Early in the century Madagascar was a nation of fierce idolaters. The first missionaries were told that they might as well try to convert cattle as the natives of Madagascar. The most inhuman cruelties were practiced upon

the first converts, and as late as 1857 two thousand native Christians were put to death for their faith. But out of that period of terrible persecution a host of believers came forth. Persecution did not stop the work. In the end it promoted the cause of Christ. As is usually the case, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. Now the number of believers on the island is reported at 114,000, with nearly half a million adherents. More than 5000 ordained and native preachers are at work in Madagascar to-day.

By the latest statistics, 285 Protestant and 34 Roman Catholic societies are represented in mission work in the Dark Continent, all pressing toward the center, and encouraged by the results already secured. The Bible, or portions of it, has already been translated into many of the languages of Africa. In India Christian converts are scattered through more than 6000 native villages, to say nothing of the work in the important centers. Hundreds of printing-presses are supplying the people with a Christian literature, and the old pagan systems are showing signs of increasing decrepitude. In Burmah there was not a Christian seventy-five years ago. Now there are not far from 100,000 believers. The Baptists alone have five hundred churches and nearly 30,000 communicants. A generation ago there was not a score of Christian converts in Japan. Now they are numbered by the thousands, with hundreds of churches, many schools and colleges, and over 500 young men studying for the ministry. The great empire of China has been invaded by missionaries in all directions, and Christian work has gained a strong foothold. This is doing much toward arousing the sluggish, stagnant life of the native millions. In 1843 only six Christians could be found in the empire. Now there are more than half a hundred missionary societies at work, employing more than 2400 missionaries and more than 5000 native laborers. The work of missions is flourishing in Turkey. Some of the

educational institutions which have been established by American missionaries are of as high grade as similar institutions at home. Thousands of children and young people are being trained in these schools. The past few years have been unparalleled in the record of revivals and accessions to the churches in the empire. The recent massacres, instead of retarding the work, seem to have given it a new impulse.

This rapid survey of some of the prominent mission fields affords a glimpse—only a glimpse—into the nature, extent and success of foreign missionary work as carried on to-day. Many of the beneficent effects will only be disclosed in eternity. Were we to estimate results as indicated by numbers converted, which is only a phase of these results, it might be said that as a fruit of the first century of missions (for modern missions began with William Carey one hundred years ago) to-day a million and a half members of mission churches are reported, with perhaps 5,000,000 adherents, and millions more who, to a greater or less degree, are under the influence of Christian ideas, the Christian spirit, and Christian influences in one form or another.

Were our estimate of the results of foreign mission work to be based upon the agencies employed to carry it on, it could be said that whereas one hundred years ago there were not in all Christendom a half-dozen foreign missionary societies, now there are nearly three hundred, representing all the Protestant denominations in Europe and America. In some cases missionary societies have been formed among the converted natives of these missionary lands, to carry on the work in regions yet more remote. Twelve thousand Protestant missionaries are at work in the various fields, with over 60,000 native preachers and teachers assisting them. Bibles have been translated into four hundred different languages and dialects. Christian institutions have been widely established—churches, schools of all grades, printing-

houses—a Christian literature introduced and the work is all the time extending and expanding and becoming more permanent. What an army of Christian workers from different lands, what mighty agencies are being employed, what tremendous moral and spiritual forces are in operation for the world's evangelization!—all sustained by the sympathies and prayers and voluntary offerings of millions of Christian people at home, and all prompted by the pure, unselfish love of Christ in the human heart, with a view to giving the gospel of Christ and the blessings of a Christian civilization to the nations of the earth. Who can question the ultimate outcome of such a world-wide, world-embracing movement? In some lands the work is already practically done; they have been Christianized within the past century. In others, the darkness is gradually being penetrated, deep-seated prejudices are being uprooted, debasing superstitions are giving way, hoary pagan systems are crumbling, and the influence of Christianity is being more and more felt. What is aimed at will not come about in a day, but the gospel agency is abundantly adequate to accomplish the evangelization of the world in due time. It is only those who refuse to see who declare mission work to be a failure. On the contrary, no enterprise of the world has been more successful, or can show such gratifying results. No work since the apostolic days has been attended with such marks of the divine favor as the work of foreign missions, while now the barriers to its progress are everywhere broken down, and hundreds and thousands of young men and women are offering themselves to engage in it. The truth is, no objection can be urged against foreign mission work, which is not equally valid against Christianity itself. It is sure to triumph. Christ's kingdom will come. In the fine and forceful language of Secretary Judson Smith, of the American Board:

“It needs no superior insight, but the single eye of candor to discern that the power which once transfigured the

pagan empire of the Cæsars and laid the spell of the gospel on the rising nations of Europe, the power which for eighteen centuries has trod one uniform path of progress and increasing sway over the forces of the human mind and of human life, is to-day making resistless inroads upon all the great nations and peoples of the East, and is advancing with every wheeling year to universal supremacy on earth. Dangers, seeming defeats, temporary disasters, do not daunt it or stay its course. Like the tide, which obeys a heavenly impulse and steadily advances on the shore until it whelms beneath its waters every rock and headland that lies within its path, this onward movement of the kingdom of Christ pauses not, rests not, knows no impossibilities, and feels no check. They who resist it must yield or be overthrown. They who move with it march on to the conquests of the earth and to the ceaseless joys of heaven!"



BOOK IV  
THE DIVINE SOURCE



## XIV

### POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS AS TO THE NATURE AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the treatment of the topics we have now considered, we have constantly kept in mind our dependence upon God and his Son Jesus Christ. We have not failed to emphasize the importance of the constant use of Scripture for personal growth in grace, and the need of constant communion with God through faith and prayer. These are the divine sources to which we may and must resort if we realize in our Christian life, in however feeble a measure, the ideals we cherish. But there is another aspect of the divine help which we need to consider, viz:—the aid which comes to us through the Holy Spirit.

In planning a military campaign, it is important to know definitely what resources are available for support, what supplies in men and in munitions of war may be relied upon, what reinforcements are within reach if occasion should demand. It is no less essential in planning aggressive spiritual movements to understand the means to be employed, the weapons, the available supplies, the inspirations which may be brought to bear, in order to meet and overthrow the spiritual enemy. Recognizing our dependence upon the Holy Spirit for needed equipment, for effective Christian service, for impulse, for strength, for wisdom to direct, it may be of advantage to call attention to a few phases of his office and work. In this effort to set forth the New Testament teaching upon the subject, we shall hope to correct various erroneous and mischievous views which are more or less widely prevalent in regard to his nature and work. The attempt will not be to present new things, but to emphasize truths which

are intimately related to spiritual progress, whether as pertaining to the individual, or to Christian work, locally or in its world-wide aspects.

Christ's teaching as to the Holy Spirit is one of the most distinctive features of his gospel. It is really the practical working doctrine of the Christian life and the Christian Church. The Holy Spirit is the embodiment of all spiritual energy, illumination and power. His marvelous workings are especially illustrated in the Book of Acts—which might not improperly be called the Book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit—and his displays of energy from time to time in the history of the Church have been hardly less remarkable than in the first century of our era. The doctrine appears in the Old Testament only in a rudimentary form, which is true, indeed, of most of the great doctrines, but it blossoms out in the fulness of its perfection in the New Testament. It is most clearly set forth in the farewell discourses of our Lord to his disciples. The Holy Spirit was to be his invisible representative in the world after his departure from it; was to carry forward and complete the work which he had begun, and which, since his ascension, has been enlarging and expanding with each succeeding century.

Yet, important as this doctrine is,—and it is vital to the progress of the kingdom of God in this world,—it seems to be one little appreciated, one concerning which there are many misconceptions on the part of many Christian people and many Christian churches. The teaching of the Bible in regard to God the Father is recognized and magnified, so is its teaching in regard to God the Son, but although this teaching is almost if not equally strong and explicit in regard to God the Holy Spirit, there seems to be a strange reluctance to accept it in its full significance, or to regard the Holy Spirit himself as anything more than an influence, an impersonal "it." It may be—doubtless it is the case—that the lack of spiritual aggressiveness and power on the part of

many of our churches to-day, of so many individual Christians, and the cause of so much spiritual feebleness and barrenness of results, is to be traced to this practical unbelief in God the Holy Spirit. We are by no means to honor God the Father and God the Son any less than we do, but it is important to understand, to appreciate, and to honor God the Holy Spirit a great deal more than we do. "Them that honor me, I will honor," is as true with reference to God the Holy Spirit as to God the Father and God the Son.

1. First, then, the Holy Spirit is described in the New Testament as a person. He is called another Comforter, an Advocate, invisible yet real. He is sent by the Father in Christ's name, although in one place (John 16:7) Christ himself is said to send him. He is to bring to the remembrance of the disciples what Christ had taught them, and to prepare them for their great responsibility. Personal pronouns are applied to him. It is always "he" or "him." "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John 16:13, 14). The name is used about fifty times in the Book of Acts, and always as if a person were referred to.

Moody says that he was a Christian at least ten years before he believed the Holy Spirit to be a person. Once when at church he heard an aged minister say this, and thought surely he must be wrong. On going home, he took his Bible and began diligently to study it, in order to determine the truth of the matter. The result was, he was fully convinced that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is as much a person as God the Father and God the Son are persons. He is invisible, but so is God the Father and God the Son, yet this is nothing

against his personality. A recognition of this fact that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, with all the attributes of divinity, instead of being a mere impersonal influence, is of the utmost importance.

One of the functions of this invisible yet real and divine Spirit was to preside over and to direct the operations of the new and developing spiritual kingdom which Christ had founded. His presence would be recognized by certain unmistakable signs. He would influence believers to go here and there, and would gird them for their responsibilities. He would inspire great movements within the Church, like world-embracing missionary endeavors. All that Christ could have done, had he remained on the earth, the Holy Spirit would do, and even more. He could be everywhere, while Christ and his disciples were restricted in their movements. All through the Book of Acts we see how every step of the work was directed by the one presiding Spirit. It was the Spirit who accomplished that mighty work at Pentecost; it was the Spirit who called Paul and Barnabas to the missionary service, saying, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." It was the Spirit who directed them as they went forth upon their mission. It was the Spirit who told Philip to go and join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch. It was the Spirit who said to Peter, "Behold, three men seek thee." All this is very striking, but it is constantly brought out in the Book of Acts. The Spirit was ever present, always directing in all the spiritual enterprises which were undertaken, and giving them success.

What the Spirit did in the days of Paul, he has been doing ever since—working in and through believers, and in and through his Church in its different branches, exerting also an influence upon the hearts of men everywhere. He still continues to direct the affairs of the kingdom, inciting men to engage in missionary work at home and abroad, seeking to compass the same world-wide ends

which Christ would have done had he remained on earth. We are living in the dispensation of the Spirit. This dispensation began at Pentecost when he came in power. He has remained in the world ever since, supreme in the Church, the vicar of Christ. This oversight and direction of Christ's spiritual kingdom by the Spirit will continue, in harmony with the divine plans, until the rule of Christ is everywhere triumphant, and he himself shall come again in glory.

2. Notice, next, the work of the Holy Spirit with individuals. All his work, it is true, is with individuals, but we are now to examine some phases of it in particular. He was to work upon and within and through, or by means of individuals. He was to convince or convict men of their sins and their need of Christ, and persuade them, if possible, to turn to him. He was to originate and then to nourish a new life within their souls. He was to sanctify, cleanse, make holy and Christlike; to be an inward helper; to qualify men for effective service, enduing them with energy and power. In all this, he was to glorify Christ; this was his preeminent function. He was not to exalt himself, but Christ—to reveal, to honor, to glorify him. Observe:—

(1) The convictive work of the Spirit, or his work on the sinner's heart; its nature, and the supreme end in view.

This phase of the Spirit's work is to lead the unbeliever to realize his sinful condition before a holy God, his need of a Saviour, and to persuade him to accept Christ, and thus find forgiveness, peace and hope in him. It is to bring one to a recognition of the truth concerning himself, to reveal a person to himself, that he may see what his relation to God is. One is thus led to perceive how it is possible to be outwardly moral while yet one's secret spirit or purpose is at variance with God's will. Realizing his condition, his conscience condemns him, and he feels that God's frown rests upon him. He sees, too, that he is in

bondage to an evil nature or principle, from which he cannot break away, and he realizes that, without help from outside and above himself, he is lost. If one is ever, from any cause, led to feel this anxiety in regard to his spiritual condition, to recognize his sinfulness, to desire forgiveness, to long for a pure life within, and to devote himself to the service of God, it is because the Holy Spirit has been at work in his heart. Yet all this avails nothing save as one is led to form a purpose to turn from his past, to seek Christ, and to enter upon a new life. This is what the Spirit prompts him to do when convicting him of sin.

It has been found that some of the ancient MSS. which modern research has brought to light were written over by a medieval scribe with the treatises of a monkish theologian. Thus the gospel, or epistle, or other book of Scripture originally engrossed on the parchment was obscured. By the application of a chemical substance, these original sacred records have been reproduced, and are now employed as authority in settling the reading of disputed passages of Scripture. The human heart has been called a palimpsest. The law of God originally written on it, has been written over and obscured by sin, so that the original is scarcely traceable. Yet somehow, by the divine alchemy of the Holy Spirit, this is brought to light, and one is led to see what he is, what he ought to become, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the one and only guide which he can safely follow.

(2) Nor may we overlook the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It seems marvelous, when we think of it, what the Spirit does in seeking to lead the sinner to Christ. It is an evidence of the exhaustless and yearning love of God, who does in this way all that can be done short of actually compelling the will—which he never does—to save a soul from sin, from its fearful ravages, from its eternal consequences. But even after a soul yields, and the new life is begun—a life of new aims,

new hopes, new affections, new activities—the Holy Spirit by no means ceases his work. He continues to operate within the heart, to nourish and sustain the new life, and to carry forward a gradually transforming process, cleansing, renewing, making over, developing a Christlikeness of character and spirit, a process which lasts as long as life. We all know well the need of such a work as this. Our natural tendencies are away from God, and when we become Christians all the evil in our hearts is by no means rooted out. The new life needs constant care; impulses of evil have not been entirely subdued; the motives need to be purified, and the whole life to be brought increasingly under the power of Christ. Such a work cannot be brought about in a moment; it is a life process. Nor can one accomplish it in his own strength. It can only be effected by the inworking presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

As the work goes on, the fruits of the Spirit begin to appear. These fruits are referred to in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, and their nature is indicated in the words, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law" (Gal. 5; 22, 23). In these fruits we have the practical "witness of the Spirit," that he is in the heart and working there to promote holiness of character and life.

(3) We notice, thirdly, another phase of the work of the Holy Spirit. He endues the believer with energy, impulse, power to qualify him for effectiveness in Christian service. The convictive work of the Spirit is a reality in the experience. So is his sanctifying work within the heart. In like manner, the anointing or energizing of the believer by the Spirit is also a reality for such as will receive it. The service which the early believers were to render was mainly that of witness-bearing. They were to give personal testimony to the divine character of Christ as disclosed to them through his life,

his words, his works, crowning and confirming all by his resurrection, and by what they knew experimentally of the power of the grace of God to convert and save. It was by this method, primarily, viz: witness-bearing, that Christ's kingdom was to be promoted among men. "Ye are my witnesses," says God in Isaiah (43: 12), i. e., to testify of my faithful dealing, to my fidelity, to my promises, to the truth of what I have made known to you. You are to testify of these things to others, that they also may be convinced and led to believe in me and be loyal to my cause. In the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews we have a long and illustrious roll of these witnesses, most of whom sealed their testimony with their blood.

The disciples of Christ were to be witnesses of him to others, making known his message of salvation, that they also might believe and be saved. They were to testify to what they personally knew, and this testimony accompanied by the Spirit would, more than anything else, lead to the multiplication of believers, and hasten the triumph of Christ's kingdom. There would be times when argument would be needed. Various forms of Christian service, calling all their powers into requisition, would be required, yet simple witness-bearing was to be the agency, specially relied upon, for establishing Christ's kingdom on earth.

But the disciples were not at once prepared to go forth upon their mission. Their faith was weak; their convictions were far from strong and unwavering; they were not filled with the mighty impulse needed for so great an undertaking; they were not ready to cope with the difficulties and discouragements which were certain to overtake them; they were not qualified to preach with spiritual power, or to do effective personal work. This the Saviour well knew. So he bade them tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with the impulse and power which he had promised to impart. They did so, as is graphically

set forth in the story of Pentecost. Day after day they met and prayed for the one thing which was lacking to complete their preparation. The blessing came. The Spirit was poured out. The effect upon the disciples was marvelous, electrical. After this there was no more hesitancy or wavering. Now they were strong in the faith. Their spiritual insight was clear; their convictions were deep and mighty; their tongues were unloosed, and they were conscious of a powerful impulse from within to engage in active effort for the cause of Him they loved. Now they could bear witness unfalteringly in the face of difficulties and dangers. They could testify for Christ everywhere with effectiveness and power, and this they did to the end of their lives.

The same responsibility rests upon Christian disciples still, according to their ability and opportunity. They are to testify to the things which they know in their own experience of the power of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. They are to do this, not alone in the prayer-meeting, nor simply by their silent example, but by word of mouth as opportunity offers, and in all consistent ways, both direct and indirect. Christianity would have made far more rapid progress in the world if Christ's disciples had only recognized their responsibility in this respect, and had more faithfully sought to meet it.

Why have they not done this, and done it more generally? Why is there so little impulse to do it? Why are Christian people so reluctant and so timid? Why does the cause of Christ so often languish? It is simply because Christians have not sufficiently appreciated their mission as witness-bearers, and have not sought or experienced the energizing presence of the Holy Spirit, adequately to qualify them for this service, and impel them to engage in it. This is why so comparatively little aggressive Christian work is rendered. It is because there is so little of this divine anointing on the part of Christian people and Christian ministers and churches.

There is plenty of organization and abundance of machinery. All the elements of efficiency exist save this. There is lack of power. It is like mills which need to have the water turned on to set them in motion; like vessels with sails spread, but with no wind to propel them; like an engine attached to a train, but with no steam to set it in motion; like cable-cars on the track but not attached to the cable; like a trolley-car not connected with the electric current.

But the power of God is abundant, even limitless, and it is available for every believer who will receive it, to qualify him to engage effectively in witness-bearing, or in any other form of Christian service for which he is adapted, and to which he may be called. "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you" (Acts 1; 8). This is the promise which Christ made to his disciples. This promise was fulfilled, and the power which came upon them is for us in our measure, if we fulfil the conditions upon which it is promised. There may be no miraculous accompaniments, as at Pentecost—no such necessity now exists—but the power will be granted in the degree which our exigencies require, if with the faith, the consecration, the longing desire, the earnest and continued prayer of the disciples we plead with the Father in Christ's name for the gift of his Spirit.

(4) Another consideration, whose importance calls for special notice, and concerning which many make mistake, has reference to the nature or kind of service for which the Spirit energizes the believer. Is this service to be all of the same kind? Are all who are anointed of God by his Spirit to engage in the same sort of activity? Is it to be witness-bearing alone? By no means. The same diversity appears here which is manifested in every other sphere of activity. Men have differing natural gifts, different temperaments, different individualities, and these differences are not obliterated by the operation of the Spirit. Rather are they intensified through his quickening influence:

Yet many seem to imagine that the enduement of the Spirit is intended to qualify man for one particular form of Christian service alone, viz.: that pertaining to the winning of souls to Christ. Many seek the heavenly anointing or baptism of which we have been speaking, with this as the one and only thought. It does not seem to have occurred to them that spiritual anointing can have reference to anything else than the winning of souls. Frequently ministers and other Christian workers agonize in prayer for more power for this special purpose. Were it granted, they would certainly be able to speak with something of the converting power which characterized a Finney. But they overlook an important fact, viz.: that this new spiritual energy, ordinarily, manifests itself along the line of one's peculiar natural aptitudes. One man may be an exceptionally good pastor, but not effective as a preacher. He may be very successful in his private personal work, but not in winning men to Christ through public exhortation. The probability is that if he is anointed with spiritual power it will mainly appear in connection with those forms of service for which he has most natural aptitude. He will doubtless be greatly helped in his preaching and in all forms of Christian effort, but he can hardly expect a miracle to be wrought in his behalf; to be transformed into a Moody, for example, when his natural temperament, his tastes, and his aptitudes may all lie in an altogether different direction.

The truth is, it was never intended that all persons should render precisely the same kind of Christian service. Each one is fitted for some special form of usefulness. There is ample scope for every variety of it. One may be apt to teach, another may have business qualities, another administrative abilities, another musical talent, another an eloquent tongue, another the power of leadership, another large sympathies, another social gifts. The gifts which we possess by nature will usually determine the direction of most efficient service. When, in answer

to earnest supplication, the Spirit of God is imparted in unusual measure, the probability is that this energizing power will be manifested chiefly along the line of these natural aptitudes. Latent powers, also, whose existence has been unsuspected, may be brought to light through the Spirit's quickening influence. This, indeed, is not infrequently the case. But gifts entirely new are not likely to be imparted. One who has power of song will be able to sing for Christ more effectively; one with social qualities will be able to employ them more successfully for Christian ends; one who has power of leadership will be able to exercise that talent more wisely for the Master; one person will be qualified to minister more efficiently in the sick-chamber; another to speak in public with greater unction and power; another to testify more helpfully of the grace of Christ; another to be more persuasive in efforts to win men to him. All these gifts are originally from the Spirit, and now, by this special enduement, they are energized or rendered more effective in their exercise, by the same agency.

This view harmonizes perfectly with the teachings of the sacred Word. "Now there are diversities of gifts," says Paul, in writing to the Corinthian Christians, "but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit, the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit: to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will" (1 Cor. 12; 4-11).

In his Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 12:6-8) Paul says again: "And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting; he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness." There is a great variety of manifestations along different lines, but it is one and the same Spirit who is back of, inspiring, energizing, guiding all.

The same thing is true in principle to-day. The one Spirit manifests himself in and through believers in accordance with their different temperaments, natural tendencies, gifts. When a special anointing or endowment or baptism is sought and experienced and a new energy for Christian service is imparted, the exercise or efficiency of these natural powers is enlarged and intensified. In this way provision is made for utilizing for Christian ends all the abilities, of whatever sort, which men possess. In this way, also, all necessary forms of Christian service are provided for. The entire circle of Christian activity is included. Were Christian people everywhere to seek and realize this divine anointing, all the forces of the kingdom would be set to work, each in his appropriate sphere of service; all their special gifts would be utilized; all varieties of Christian service would receive their due proportion of attention; and the early triumph of Christ's kingdom would be assured. Christian people are not to seek to promote their own personal ends as their chief aim in life, nor yet to strive to do impossible things in the realm of Christian service, but it is manifestly the clear duty, to say nothing of the exalted privilege, of every disciple of Christ to seek such an endowment of spiritual energy and power by the Spirit, as to enable him to do most effectively what he is best fitted by nature and by grace to do for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

Thus we see what the Biblical teaching is as to the main function of the Holy Spirit in his relation to the work of redemption and to the progress and final triumph of Christ's kingdom. He is a divine person, as God the Father and God the Son are divine. He was sent into the world after Christ's departure from it, to be his invisible representative, to superintend and to administer the spiritual kingdom which he inaugurated, until Christ should come again. The Spirit's work was to be primarily with the individual, to convict of sin, to point to Christ as Saviour, and to persuade men to accept Christ; to work within the believer, to secure his progressive sanctification; to work through him to bring Christian influence to bear upon the unconverted and win them to Christ. It was the function of the Spirit, also, to anoint believers with spiritual power, to qualify them for effectiveness in Christian service, and to impart needed wisdom and guidance in the same. The conditions of receiving this spiritual endowment or power were a complete self-surrender, a perfect consecration, with earnest and continued supplication. Furthermore, this added power was to be employed for unselfish ends in connection with the work of the kingdom. This anointing by the Spirit would manifest itself chiefly along the lines of natural aptitudes or gifts, intensifying and energizing their action. We may not be entirely clear as to the nature or extent of the Spirit's work in the world at large, but that he is all the time moving upon the hearts of men, at home and beyond the seas, and among all classes and conditions of people, preparing the way for the reception of the truth and of Christ himself at length, there can be no question.

Enough has been said to show how great and how important the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is, how vital the relation of the Spirit himself to the conversion and sanctification of men; to their efficiency in Christian service, and to the progress and final triumph of Christ's kingdom in the world.

Nor are the blessings of spiritual enduement limited to a favored few. They are designed for all who will receive them. Every believer, however humble, who will fulfil the necessary conditions, may have imparted to him a new and larger measure of grace and spiritual power, to enable him to render his life in the largest degree useful to the cause of Christ.

We also see how the latent forces of the individual Christian or of a Christian church may be developed and utilized. It is through seeking a fresh anointing of the Spirit. Every person at conversion has some measure of divine anointing, but it is his privilege as he continues in this new life to experience a fuller, more complete enduement, to fortify his courage, to brighten his hopes, to enrich his experience, to quicken his activities, and to enable him to do the very utmost of which he is capable for Christ. It is his privilege to have access to all the spiritual grace and power which he is prepared to utilize.

One of the urgent needs of the times, in all our churches, is a more intelligent appreciation of the fact of the exhaustless spiritual resources which are available, and a more practical and constant appropriation of them. With that, a new, deeper, richer spiritual life would pervade them. Then would a new and mighty impulse of Christian activity be manifest in them. Then would latent energies, now slumbering, be quickened into life and activity. Then would all forms of necessary Christian service be more faithfully and energetically carried forward. Then would there be added to the churches daily, as in apostolic times, of such as are being saved, and the cause of Christ everywhere, the world over, would be mightily advanced.

One or two authentic instances will illustrate both the nature of the Spirit's energizing work, and the practical character of the results which may be realized when a common desire and purpose exists among Christian people to utilize the spiritual resources which have been placed within their reach.

Some years since, in one of our largest and most prominent schools of divinity, a little company of students, two or three only at first, lamenting the low spiritual condition which seemed to prevail in the institution, resolved to meet daily to pray for a fresh enduement of spiritual life and power for themselves and for all their associates, who were in preparation for the ministry. Gradually their number increased, but this was the one theme of their conferences and prayers—a new manifestation of the Spirit's presence and power among them. It was not long before they all became conscious of a spiritual quickening, then of a new impulse to Christian activity. Then their interest began to be communicated to others. This was apparent in increased attendance at all the weekly religious gatherings of the seminary. This interest was carried into some of the prayer-meetings of the city, which the students were accustomed to attend, into Sunday-school work, and into various other forms of Christian activity with which they were associated. Then there was a revived religious life throughout the institution, and a new and pronounced impulse was given to all forms of Christian activity, so marked as to be recognized by all, and to excite general comment. And it all came about in the simple way indicated. It was in accordance with the principle which was so conspicuously illustrated at Pentecost. It was, in fact, a Pentecost to those who were associated in the movement. They sought and received a fresh effusion of the Spirit, and under the influence of his quickening presence they were enabled and were impelled to render more effective Christian service than before, and this chiefly in the direction of their prevailing aptitudes.

Later, one of these students, remembering this experience, and seeking to profit by its lessons, was led to apply the same principle with reference to the reviving of a church of which he had become the pastor. The church, as he found it, was at low ebb spiritually. For some

time previously there had been a movement of rank liberalism in the community. Although at this time this movement had spent its force, it had left its baneful effects behind. Christian people were discouraged, and the cause of Christ was languishing. The young pastor called a number of the more earnest church-members about him; explained to them the nature and work of the Holy Spirit; showed them how it was possible for them to experience his quickening presence and power if they would; how by this means the whole church might be revived in spiritual life and aroused to active and aggressive service; how a movement might be started whose blessed results would be beyond computation. They listened to his words and responded to his appeal. Then and there they began to make this end the object of their united prayers. From time to time they met for this purpose, others joining their number. Cottage meetings were held, with a growing attendance and increasing interest. It was not long before a new activity was manifest throughout the church. Many whose voices had never before been heard in public, joined others in bearing testimony and in prayer. Many, too, who at the outset had declared the impossibility of their ever engaging in personal religious work found it easy and delightful to do so. Special meetings, mostly of an informal character, were continued in the church for several weeks. The pastor's exhortations were brief and the time was mostly filled with personal testimonies: which followed each other in quick succession. No time was allowed to go to waste. There was a wonderful loosening of tongues. The Spirit of God was there, and where he is, there is liberty.

Nor were there any signs of "excitement." Everything, on the contrary, was quiet, subdued. A deep and earnest thoughtfulness prevailed. Gradually the entire community seemed to be pervaded by the Spirit's presence. Not all may have been able to account for the existing

state of things, but there were few who failed to recognize it. There was a growing number of inquiries among the unconverted, and many were led to make the great decision, and to enter upon the new life. It was a remarkable spiritual movement, the immediate fruits of which were that nearly one hundred came into the church, most of whom were adults, the majority of them heads of families, many of them being among the most prominent representatives of the business and social life of the place.

Nor was this all. Immediately thereafter, there was a movement to conserve this new interest, as far as possible, in a permanent way. The church was thoroughly organized, the Spirit leading as before. Provision was made for the activity, in some definite and helpful way, of all the members. There was a place and a work for every believer. The next season, special work was resumed and was carried on in much the same way as before. The outcome was another large accession to the church, in which were included many of those who had been actively connected with the liberalistic movement, but who had not been reached by the spiritual revival of the previous year. All this was by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was so recognized by the church, in answer to earnest, united and persistent prayer on the part of many believing souls.

It may be added that that same earnest spirit seemed to linger in the church for years thereafter, and from time to time there were signal displays of the same gracious Presence, with corresponding results. Furthermore, the same pastor, in other fields, and by the employment of similar means, was so able to direct the thoughts and enlist the prayers of the people that results of like character, varying in power according to existing conditions, were almost uniformly brought about.

These facts from actual experience suggest methods for all our churches by which their effectiveness may be greatly increased, their latent energies be developed and

applied, and many more than is ordinarily the case be converted and saved. But in order to obtain such results, there must be, on the part of Christian people, what is now too often lacking—a positive belief in the Holy Spirit, in the reality of his existence, his personality, his divine power and availability. This must be accompanied with united and persistent supplication, with sincerity, even agonizing desire, for his anointing presence and converting power. There must be a willingness to continue this supplication until the blessing comes, and the church, impelled from within, is ready for service. Thus aroused and stirred to action, a church becomes an irresistible power for righteousness and salvation.













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